

DISCIPLINE, KNOWLEDGE, AND CRITIQUE:
MARXIST THEORY AND THE REVIVAL OF THE STATE IN AMERICAN POLITICAL
SCIENCE, 1968-1989

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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For my parents, Arnold and Rimma

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DISCIPLINE, KNOWLEDGE, AND CRITIQUE: MARXIST THEORY AND THE REVIVAL
OF THE STATE IN AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE, 1968-1989

This dissertation is a study of the theorization and usages of the concept of "the state" within the history of American political science. I concentrate on the revival of scholarly interest in this concept between the 1960s-1980s, after it had initially faded from prominence in the mid-twentieth century, asking why it took place in the time and manner that it did. I reconstruct this moment by focusing on how contemporary European neo-Marxist debates about the capitalist state were received and incorporated into the American social scientific context. I argue that, through the influence of these discussions, a renewed interest in the state provided a unique theoretical standpoint from which to critique the prevailing normative assumptions and professional practices within the field. I trace this influence of Marxist theory by focusing on two key research initiatives of the 1980s: the Social Science Research Council's "Committee on States and Social Structures," and the Woodrow Wilson Center's research project "Transitions from Authoritarian Rule." Through this critical genealogy, I suggest that discourses of the state can act as key vantage points for understanding the intersection of disciplinary identity, political power, and knowledge-producing practices in liberal democratic societies. Therefore, this research contributes to the intellectual history of American political science, by demonstrating the forgotten importance that Marxist theory played in the revival of the state; to contemporary political and democratic theory, by arguing for the ongoing relevance of the state as a concept bridging theory and practice; and to political discussions concerning the present crisis of liberal democracy.

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Introduction: Political Science, Liberalism, and Disciplinary History

“Political science has multiple histories,” claimed John Dryzek and Stephen Leonard nearly thirty years ago in arguing for the importance of studying the discipline’s past in order to better understand its values and practices in the present.¹ In the years since, it has become increasingly accepted that the historical construct called “political science” is an accumulation of vastly different intellectual traditions, epistemic frameworks, and methodological approaches. Political science is now widely seen as a post-paradigmatic field, made up of various strands of inquiry, each contributing its own peculiar trajectory and baggage to what is often a tenuous unity.²

Perhaps as a response to this disciplinary drift, there have also been efforts to emphasize some foundational elements for the self-identity of American political science. For example, Ira Katznelson and Helen Milner, the editors of the 2002 collection *Political Science: State of the Discipline*, have suggested that “underneath its flux, political science has been uncommonly continuous in its central concepts and substantive themes...contested and methodologically diverse, political science nonetheless remains focused, as it has for a century, on a particular understanding of how to study the modern state and liberal democracy.”³ For Katznelson and Milner, this continuity is due to a pragmatic and non-metaphysical treatment of the state, focusing on the study of its institutions in relation to the dynamics of power and choice; and to a

¹ John S. Dryzek and Stephen T. Leonard, “History and Discipline in Political Science,” *American Political Science Review* 82 (1988): 1246.

² One of the earliest such claims is found in Terence Ball, “From Paradigms to Research Programs: Toward a Post-Kuhnian Political Science,” *American Journal of Political Science* 20 (1976): 151-77.

³ Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner, “American Political Science: The Discipline’s State and the State of the Discipline,” in *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*, edited by Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 7, 25.

general concern with the politics of liberal democracy, expressed in terms of the relationship between the state and civil society, as well as citizenship, rights, and political participation.⁴

Whether explicitly asserted or implicitly assumed, both the state and liberal democracy mutually evolved to become the key components through which political science in the United States (which, after World War II, took on *global* significance) has taken shape. Both are deeply contested and politicized ideas and practices, inflected with normative, symbolic, and rhetorical power, whose usage has varied depending on context and purpose. Due to their privileged position as institutional gatekeepers and arbiters, practitioners of political science have played a crucial role in adjudicating the conceptual boundaries and the “legitimate” methods and approaches through which social knowledge concerning these topics is created, reproduced, and disseminated.

Recognizing this dynamic, a small but consistent stream of disciplinary histories since the 1980s have sought to untangle these links between the state, liberal democracy, and the production of social scientific knowledge; to examine how these ideas have been framed, asserted, or even omitted within some vision of the broader “mission” or purpose of political science; and to show how the aspirations to objectivity that characterize modern social scientific knowledge are shaped by historical and social contexts. This disciplinary self-reflection remains crucial today for understanding how social scientific knowledge and political and social power intersect; how the formation, deployment, or omission of key concepts like “the state” can be symptoms of an underlying political rationale; and how the nominal objectivity of social scientific knowledge remains informed by unacknowledged normative values. The normative motivations and goal of the present study also fall squarely into this framework.

⁴ Katznelson and Milner, “American Political Science,” 2, 17, 5-6.

In this dissertation I advance a critical genealogy of American political science, through an interpretation of a specific development in the field from the late 1960s to the late 1980s. Here I understand a key aspect of the genealogical approach to the social sciences to be “the emphasis it places on moments of contestation and power relations at particular historical junctures.”⁵ Approached from this perspective, the period evaluated in this dissertation can be understood as a symptomatic moment in the history of the field as whole. During that time, a growing mismatch between social and political reality and predominant frameworks of analysis encouraged scholars to search for an alternative standpoint from which to reevaluate the existing relationship between the discipline and the liberal context in which it had taken shape. This led to two intersecting shifts: the emergence of “post-behavioral” political science advancing heterodox theoretical approaches such as Marxism that had previously been excluded or marginalized within the field; and an explicit revival of interest in the state as an object of knowledge around which political science inquiry could be conducted.

In studying this moment, I will argue that the concept of the state gradually became an inroad through which new questions about the theoretical foundations, normative assumptions, and political purpose of the discipline were posed. This change was especially facilitated by the introduction of concurrent discussions of the state within Marxist political theory, which subsequently left an imprint on the discipline. These two strands of inquiry were mutually reinforcing: they converged as modes of questioning the ties between political science and the American state, and challenged the liberal foundations and the implicit American exceptionalism within the disciplinary mainstream. By choosing to focus on the “rediscovery” of the state between the 1960s-1980s, I suggest that this moment provides a rich historical example through

⁵ Robert Lamb, “Historicism,” in *Routledge Handbook of Interpretive Political Science*, edited by Mark Bevir and R.A.W. Rhodes (London: Routledge, 2016), 81.

which we can investigate the longstanding and complex relationship between American political science and the politics of liberal democracy.

This forgotten moment not only affected the shape taken by the discipline, but also underscores the relationship between the production of social scientific knowledge, state power, and modern liberalism today. The contemporary crisis of liberal democracy has revived interest in the state, and its role and capacity for mediating the tensions between democracy and capitalism. Revisiting the critical perspectives on the state captured in past Marxist accounts can help us better understand both the linkages between political and socio-economic power that have characterized the recent “neoliberal” era, as well as the emergence of contemporary opposition movements to this model on both the right and the left. In addition, by highlighting the link between political science and the state, it allows us to ask whether a possible “road not taken” during an earlier moment in the discipline’s history concerning the theorization of the state has, in recent decades, precluded a more overt critique of contemporary capitalism from taking hold within its mainstream scholarship today.

With this in mind, we can pose some key guiding questions: If an abstract concept like the state indeed undergirds much of the historical and theoretical foundations of modern political science, how are we to understand that, at one point, leading segments of the discipline sought to extricate themselves from this notion? What theoretical, ideological, and socio-political causes led scholars to overtly embrace the state again? Why was this reorientation facilitated through the importation of a different theoretical discourse—Marxism—largely foreign to the development of American political science up till then? And in what way were Marxist accounts of the state then subsumed into the disciplinary mainstream?

In the following four chapters, I will engage these questions through a detailed historical reconstruction, revisiting some of the key debates, contestations, and conclusions that came to define this transitional period in the history of American political science. However, in the remaining pages of this Introduction, I would first like to underscore three key themes for this project: the advantages of using the state concept for commenting on the knowledge-producing practices of the discipline; the relationship between discourses of the state and the political context of the postwar United States; and the role played by Marxist political theory in challenging the assumptions and biases that had previously gone unacknowledged within mainstream political science.

I. Disciplinary Histories and the State

Whether they are gradual evolutions or self-conscious breaks, intellectual and theoretical shifts within social scientific disciplines frequently occur in the context of a history that must first be constructed and articulated—even if so that it can then be cast aside.⁶ As Gabriel Almond quipped in his famous 1988 essay “Separate Tables,” “whoever controls the interpretation of the past in our professional history writing has gone a long way toward controlling the future.”⁷ Reconstructions of the past history of political science have thus been a discursive tool for political scientists to justify their own theoretical and normative visions of the field’s purpose.

Consider the example of David Truman’s 1965 Presidential address to the American Political Science Association. According to Truman, from approximately the 1880s to the 1930s political science in the United States was a descriptive, “raw empiricist” enterprise that was short

⁶ Robert Adcock and Mark Bevir, “The History of Political Science,” *Political Studies Review* 3 (2005): 2.

⁷ Gabriel Almond, “Separate Tables: Schools and Sects in Political Science,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 21 (1988): 835.

on theory and too closely tied to the reformist goals of the Progressive era.⁸ Invoking the recent Kuhnian notion of a paradigm shift, Truman attempted to capture the scientific gains of the behavioral revolution moving forward.⁹ As he wrote, “the study of politics is old, but political science as a self-conscious discipline has not come a long road. Redefinition and redirection will depend upon the emergence of a new and broadly based consensus about the discipline.”¹⁰ For Truman, that consensus about the discipline could be attained by focusing on the study of the political system, on greater attention to the development of empirically-grounded political theory, and on a commitment to the scientific method. This demarcation of postwar social science from an earlier “pre-scientific” period was one example of the redefinition of the discipline’s past history in light of present concerns and questions.

The postbehavioral turn of the 1960s-1980s and its critique of the practices and biases of behavioral social sciences was another example of this dynamic, since during that time the state concept became a critical weapon in a dispute over the nature and purpose of the discipline. Yet in contrast to Truman’s attempt to demarcate the “pre-scientific” past of political science from his present, one of its effects was a growing interest in writing disciplinary histories that wished to problematize the field’s implicit liberalism and scientism.¹¹ As James Farr and Raymond Seidelman noted in 1993, American political science had only then recently emerged from an era spanning from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s, in which investigations about the history of

⁸ David B. Truman, “Disillusion and Regeneration: The Quest for a Discipline,” *American Political Science Review* 49 (1965): 866.

⁹ On the continuity between pre-behavioral and behavioral political science, see Robert Adcock, “Interpreting Behavioralism” in *Modern Political Science: Anglo-American Exchanges Since 1880*, ed. Robert Adcock, Mark Bevir, and Shannon C. Stimson (Princeton University Press, 2007); and John Gunnell “The Historiography of American Political Science,” in *The Development of Political Science: A Comparative Survey*, ed. David Easton, John G. Gunnell, and Luigi Graziano, (London: Routledge, 1991).

¹⁰ Truman, “Disillusion and Regeneration,” 873.

¹¹ For example, see Dryzek and Leonard, “History and Discipline in Political Science”; and the responses by James Farr, John G. Gunnell, Raymond Seidelman, John S. Dryzek, and Stephen T. Leonard, “Can Political Science History be Neutral?” *American Political Science Review* 84 (1990): 587-607.

political science were, with one or two exceptions, nonexistent.¹² In subsequent years, debates and controversies within the discipline about its historical foundations and public purpose became more common. Ido Oren has suggested that the self-image of political science since the early twentieth century was premised on its differentiation of the American state vis-à-vis its main rivals.¹³ In that regard, the post-Cold War context provided an opportunity for introspection, as the absence of ideological rivals between 1989 and 2001 allowed a moment of self-reflexivity within the profession about its own practices and methods. The *Perestroika* controversy of the early 2000s was one example of this meta-theoretical turn, although its emphasis on methodological pluralism largely left unanswered the questions about the *practical* import of political science.¹⁴ It was followed by a cluster of further reflections on the discipline that coincided with the centennials of the American Political Science Association in 2003 and the American Political Science Review in 2006 (its 100th issue dedicated to the theme of the “evolution of political science”), but by then against the backdrop of the post-September 11 crisis of American liberalism that we continue to experience today.¹⁵

¹² James Farr and Raymond Seidelman, “General Introduction” in *Discipline and History*, ed. James Farr and Raymond Seidelman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993): 2. Notable exceptions from that time include Bernard Crick’s *The American Science of Politics: Its Origins and Conditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959) and Albert Somit and Joseph Tanenhaus, *The Development of Political Science* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1967).

¹³ Ido Oren, *Our Enemies and US: America’s Rivalries and the Making of Political Science* (Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹⁴ For a recent discussion, see John Gunnell, “Pluralism and the Fate of Perestroika: A Historical Reflection,” and the responses by James Farr, Robert O. Keohane, David D. Laitin, Kristen Renwick Monroe, Anne Norton, and Sanford S. Schram in *Perspectives on Politics* 13 (2015): 408-430.

¹⁵ Among these works are Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Oren, *Our Enemies and US*; Nicolas Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers: Human Rights and the Politics of Global Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); and S.M Amadae, *Rationalizing Capitalist Democracy: The Cold War Origins of Rational Choice Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). See also Lee Sigelman, “Introduction to the Centennial Issue,” *American Political Science Review* 100 (2006): v-xvi.

Disciplinary histories are inherently hermeneutic, requiring a self-awareness about one's own framing of the narrative about the past and present, as well as attention to the way previous narratives were constructed and displaced. This is especially true when the object of analysis is the state. Much of modern political discourse presupposes the state as the form of public authority responsible for the organizing and structuring of political life. As Jens Bartelson has argued in *The Critique of the State*, "throughout the twentieth century the state concept has conditioned the ways in which the core problems of modern political science have been phrased, despite the numerous efforts to rid the discipline of what has frequently been perceived as an ambiguous, opaque or obsolete concept."¹⁶ Whether overtly or implicitly (a key distinction), the state and its institutions continue to serve as underlying reference points for much of our contemporary political discourse and practices.

Following Pierre Bourdieu, Nicolas Guilhot has argued that social scientific disciplines are constituted by "fields" of practices (such as institutions, standards of knowledge production, normative expectations) that together "form a distinct, coherent, and relatively autonomous sphere of social activity" which "produce" their object of knowledge.¹⁷ Adopting this framework to the study of the state, I approach the history of American political science as a set of knowledge-producing practices and discourses in relation to normative visions of the American polity. Within these practices, I see the state concept functioning as *a contested representation of* these latent understandings. In terms of its relationship to political science, the state has been both a conceptual object about which a systematic knowledge of politics could be produced, and a social relation that conditions and shapes the forms that this activity takes. The normativity of this concept is inherent in its various definitions, framings, and usages over the course of its

¹⁶ Jens Bartelson, *The Critique of the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 4.

¹⁷ Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers*, 23.

history. This multifaceted character has allowed it to alternately be theorized as material and ideological, concrete and abstract, permanent and effervescent.¹⁸ Like its fellow terms such as sovereignty, liberalism, democracy, rights, and civil society, its meaning has been fundamentally debated and contested, making it both a political and a *politicized* concept. Its existence is so thoroughly intertwined with our own experiences as modern political subjects that it can present itself in multiple forms and facets, depending on the vantage point from which we approach it and the questions we raise.

For that reason, as both the object of the scientific study of politics and its condition of possibility, the state concept serves as a particularly useful lens through which to read the development of the political science discipline. This is not to say that it is the *only* lens through which this narrative can be told. For example, Guilhot has reconstructed the history of the discipline after World War II through the frame of theories and practices of democratization; while Oren's narrative has argued for the importance of America's international rivalries for understanding the trajectory of the field from the early twentieth century to the present. But rather than being mutually exclusive, I believe these are complementary accounts that address different sides of the same social and political phenomenon: the growth and expansion of American national (state) power and influence, and the formation of a corresponding "science of politics" that has sought to both explain and direct this administrative capacity toward the maintenance of liberal-capitalist democracy.

Since political science scholarship has tended to refashion the past from the present standpoint, we must pay special attention to whether theoretical questions about the discipline were framed through the language of the state; and what the absence or presence of this

¹⁸ See William J. Novak, "Conclusion: The Concept of the State in American History," in *Boundaries of the State in US History*, ed. James T. Sparrow, William J. Novak, and Stephen W. Sawyer, 325-350, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

essentially contested concept tells us about how political science has conceived of itself in relation to its object of study. Because of the state concept's complex role in the history of American political science, we must treat its usage symptomatically, paying special attention to the tensions and ambiguities that have characterized approaches to this topic. What makes the period from the 1960s to the 1980s noteworthy for illustrating the hermeneutic dimension of political science knowledge is that the field sought to "bring back in" a concept that it could never leave behind in the first place. Both the motivations to "overcome" and to "bring back" the state need to be understood hermeneutically and historically, as evidence of underlying tensions between the liberal state and democratic citizenship, between the epistemic foundations of modern social science and contested concepts, and between empirical knowledge and normative values.

Since the 1980s, disciplinary historians such as Terence Ball, James Farr, John Gunnell, Raymond Seidelman, John Dryzek, David Ricci, and David Ciepley, among others, have all commented to some extent on the development of American political science in relation to the state. Yet surprisingly (and with some exceptions), attention to the state's revival as a conceptual object in the postbehavioral era has been rather scant. Some accounts of postwar political science do not mention it at all.¹⁹ Others acknowledge the renewed interest in the state as part of the emergence of postbehavioral political science during the 1970s, yet do not seek to reconstruct the debates and dialogues whose outcome led this revival to take the shape that it did.²⁰

¹⁹ Robert Adcock and Mark Bevir, "Political Science," in *The History of the Social Sciences Since 1945*, ed. Roger Backhouse and Philippe Fontaine, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁰ See for example, Raymond Seidelman, *Disenchanted Realists: Political Science and the American Crisis* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), 185-219; James Farr, "Political Science," in *The Cambridge History of Science Volume 7: The Modern Social Sciences*, ed. Theodore Porter and Dorothy Ross (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 306-328; David Ciepley, "Why the State was Dropped in the First Place: A Prequel to Skocpol's 'Bringing the State Back In'", *Critical Review* 14 (2000): 157-213; Clyde

In addition, these treatments usually downplay the significance of this statist revival in favor of some other moment from the discipline's past. Thus, for Dryzek, the statist turn was counterintuitive to most American political scientists, and thus easy to ignore.²¹ Similarly, for Gunnell, the critique of pluralism during the late 1960s and the subsequent revival of interest in the state were largely "accidental contextual circumstances" to a "discursive structure that was deeply embedded in the discipline" which had already culminated in the 1920s.²² Even Seidelman's *Disenchanted Realists*, which maintained that a beneficial view of the state was the definitive trait of Progressive-era political science and featured a chapter on the postbehavioral "eclipse of unity," said relatively little about whether this statist revival of the late 1970s and 1980s stood as a continuation or break with this tradition.²³

In addition, while it is commonly observed that the state concept fell out of favor among scholars during the ascendant behavioral era from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, and that it was "brought back in" to the field during the 1980s, this narrative has been reproduced without sufficiently investigating what political, ideological, and social forces prompted this turn. In fact, this narrative has itself been the lasting legacy of the Committee on States and Social Structures, a collaborative research project spearheaded by Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol that sought to "bring the state back in," which will be the focus of Chapter Three.²⁴ Following this influential interpretation, since the 1980s the majority of political science

W. Barrow, "The Intellectual Origins of New Political Science," *New Political Science* 30 (2008): 215-244.

²¹ John S. Dryzek, "Revolutions Without Enemies: Key Transformations in Political Science," *American Political Science Review* 100 (2006): 487-492.

²² John G. Gunnell, "The Declination of the 'State' and the Origins of American Pluralism," in James Farr, John S. Dryzek, and Stephen T. Leonard (eds.), *Political Science in History: Research Programs and Political Traditions* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 20-21.

²³ Seidelman, *Disenchanted Realists*, 185-219.

²⁴ Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds. *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

accounts of how the state has been treated in the past have adopted a fairly linear three-stage narrative of its initial prominence, gradual forgetting, and subsequent revival, where the final stage is relatively brief and transient.²⁵ As a result, the idea that “whether treated in relatively integrated or relatively fragmented fashion, the concept of the state was brought firmly back into the mainstream of US political science,” has been reproduced in an unproblematic way as one moment among others in the evolution of the discipline.²⁶

A notable exception is the account provided by Katznelson in *Desolation and Enlightenment*. Katznelson has suggested that the neo-statist revival of the late 1970s-early 1980s (in which he was an active participant) was based on a willful misrepresentation of the intellectual and normative concerns of their forebears. He argues that after World War II, the social sciences were engaged in a deeply normative mission of “invent[ing] a realistic and proficient political science in an extended sense of the term that, at once, was institutional and historical, normative and behavioral.”²⁷ As evidence, Katznelson pointed to Columbia University’s interdisciplinary Seminar on the State initially convened during the mid-late 1940s. The participants of the seminar, including scholars like Franz Neumann, Daniel Bell, Robert Merton, Gabriel Almond, Richard Hofstadter, and David Truman, wished to develop a new theory of the liberal state in the wake of the interwar crisis. They aimed to empirically parse the state concept through the analysis of institutions, behavior, and power in order to better understand politics within a liberal regime. By approaching the state from a methodologically pluralistic analysis that sought to demystify it as a normative and metaphysical construct, they

²⁵ For examples of such treatments, see Atul Kohli, “State, Society, and Development,” in Katznelson and Milner, *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*, 86-88; Karen Barkey and Sunita Parikh, “Comparative Perspectives on the State,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 17 (1991): 523-549.

²⁶ John S. Dryzek and Patrick Dunleavy, *Theories of the Democratic State* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 7.

²⁷ Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment*, 3.

aimed to make its study “realistic and behavioral, inside an institutional frame.”²⁸ For this reason, Katznelson suggests that it is a truism that in the immediate postwar period political scientists turned away from the state, only for it to be recovered in the 1970s by “scholars dissatisfied with the complacency and intellectual blinders of mainstream political science.”²⁹

A similar critique was advanced earlier by Gabriel Almond, who accused the neo-statist revival of purposefully misreading the aims of the pluralist critique of the state. For Almond, the postwar analysis of the state was more empirical, behavioral, and policy oriented than the formal analyses of the state as a legal-judicial institution that characterized the discipline’s early years. “Legal-institutional concepts” such as the state were thus disaggregated to help facilitate empirical research and attain a greater level of conceptual precision, so that, instead of the vague abstraction of the state “one spoke of government or of the political system and its various legal-institutional components—executives, bureaucracies, legislatures, and courts—and of agencies and institutions of a paralegal and nonlegal sort such as political parties, interest groups, [and] media of communication.”³⁰

If Katznelson and Almond are correct that the state *implicitly* remained an object of analysis for American political science—and indeed even became much more of a pressing concern in the immediate wake of World War II—it is also clear that its very framing as part of the new scientific discourse of politics underwent a significant change. For while it may be true that the postwar scholarship in American and comparative politics represented by figures like Truman, Almond, David Easton, and Robert Dahl never stopped caring about the systematic interactions between political institutions and civil society, the concerted move away from the usage of the state *concept* is significant in its own right. The state was displaced by other terms,

²⁸ Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment*, 134.

²⁹ Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment*, 115.

³⁰ Gabriel Almond, “The Return to the State,” *American Political Science Review* 82 (1988): 869.

such as government and the political system, which acted as “semantic equivalents.”³¹ However, this was not a trivial change, since these ostensibly more empirically accurate (and thus more “scientific”) concepts signaled the distinctive character of postwar political science by ridding it of an ambiguous and politicized concept, effectively rendering the new science of politics “stateless.” Even if political science research continued to address individual elements of what could aggregately be called the state during the 1950s-60s, Katznelson’s and Almond’s accounts do not speak to the importance of the *discursive* shift away and toward the state. As a result, most existing disciplinary histories either gloss over or outright deny the novelty and significance of the revival of the state discourse within the larger context of discipline during the 1960s-1980s, and its subsequent influence.

The state’s revival has now itself been largely internalized within the discipline’s own historical self-perception, with minimal attention to the various nuances, dialogues, and implications concerning the identity and purpose of political science raised during that time.³² In contrast to this tendency, one of this project’s goals is to argue that “returning to the state” was a political and discursive project that was justified vis-à-vis contending paradigms, and to highlight the forgotten intellectual roots of this revival in the encounter between mainstream political science and Marxist political theory. Through a detailed reconstruction of the intellectual context and the dissemination of ideas, I will show that this change represents a key moment for the transformation of twentieth century American political science, and that it was

³¹ Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*, 183.

³² Notable exceptions are Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*; Robert Adcock, Mark Bevir, and Shannon C. Stimson, “Historicizing the New Institutionalism(s)” in *Modern Political Science: Anglo-American Exchanges since 1880* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 259-289; and Brian Waddell, “When the Past is Not Prologue: The Wagner Act Debates and the Limits of Political Science,” *New Political Science* 34 (2012): 338-357.

facilitated by a sustained engagement and incorporation of neo-Marxist political thought to an extent that was widely recognized at the time but today has largely been forgotten.

II. The State and the Politics of Cold War Liberalism

From the perspective of disciplinary history, American political science during the mid-twentieth century contained a remarkable and ironic tension. As Terence Ball summarized, in the postwar period the state “virtually disappeared from social scientists’ vocabulary, even as the American state was becoming more powerful than ever.”³³ As will I argue in greater detail in Chapter One, while during the late nineteenth century the first generation of American political scientists were preoccupied with the state when the actual American national state was still fairly weak, the growth of the federal state and the expansion of its administrative capacities from the New Deal forward was mirrored by a corresponding decline in political scientists’ usage of the state concept. The attention of early American political scientists to the state during a time when the actual American state was still comparatively weak drifted to other concerns while its administrative functions and power were actually growing at an accelerated pace. The transformation of the American state over the course of the twentieth century also spurred a new political science that, peculiarly, until the late 1970s, largely avoided talking about the state as such.

One pervasive tendency has been to treat the United States as a comparative outlier, with its federated polity often contrasted to the centralized states of the European continent. This perception of the United States as a “stateless,” decentralized republic was a feature of the conventional political wisdom of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, until the Progressive era and the New Deal. Even as late as 1968, J.P. Nettl would characterize the U.S. as

³³ Terence Ball, “American Political Science in Its Postwar Political Context,” in Farr and Seideman, eds. *Discipline and History*, 218.

a country where the notion of statehood “remained remarkable by its absence” due to its delegation of functions and powers to regional units; while Samuel Huntington would characterize it as essentially a “Tudor polity.”³⁴ However, the last three decades of research in the field of American political development have clarified the evolution of the American state by placing it in a comparative context alongside the processes undergone by continental European states, revealing both important similarities and differences.³⁵ The result of these studies has been a rejection of mid-century narratives of “American exceptionalism” that suggested the notion of the state was a foreign importation ill-fitted to an inherently liberal and pluralistic society.

These insights can help answer the puzzle of why the growth of the administrative state in the postwar period was complemented by its theoretical eclipse during the behavioral revolution. I have suggested above that we must pay careful attention to the dynamic between the state’s presence as a social force and as a form of organized political power, and its changing role as a conceptual object within the disciplinary practices of knowledge production—in other words, the interplay between its presence as a social and political reality and its mutability as a conceptual object within scholarly discourse. Therefore, its absence at a time when it should have been most explicitly at the forefront of scholars’ research agendas was not due to the

³⁴ J. P. Nettl, “The State as a Conceptual Variable” *World Politics* 20 (1968): 568; Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006 [1968]), 93-139.

³⁵ Some examples include Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Richard Bense, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* (Cambridge University Press, 1991); Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap 1995); Desmond King and Lawrence Jacobs, eds. *The Unsustainable American State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, “Comparative Perspectives on Inequality and the Quality of Democracy in the United States,” *Perspectives on Politics* 9 (2011): 841-856.

inherent liberalism of American political thought and discourse. Rather, this “disappearance” was the result of a disciplinary mutation that was shaped by concrete political developments such as the growth of domestic administrative power, the Cold War identification of the state with totalitarianism, and the global hegemony of the United States after World War II. The reluctance to speak of the state during this time was a consequence of this political and intellectual climate. Being an inherently normative and contested concept, the state became the casualty of a postwar conservative consensus unwilling to afford the space for such discussions.

In particular, this discursive and conceptual shift needs to be seen alongside the pressing question that totalitarianism posed to the postwar social sciences. It has been argued that the declining prominence of the state concept in political science was initially spurred by the ideological distance that American scholars wanted to draw between themselves and the German political tradition in the years of World War I.³⁶ However, as David Ciepley has claimed, the totalitarian experience during the 1930s and 1940s prompted a notable decline of social scientists’ faith in using the capacities of the state for progressive liberal purposes.³⁷ While the trajectory of American social science before World War II can be explained by the goal of building a new American republic, the liberal encounter with totalitarianism curtailed social scientists’ previous ability to explicitly call on the state to take up social reforms, as during the early New Deal. Postwar social science was motivated by not only the task of analyzing the breakdown of interwar liberalism, but also by the hope that systematic, careful, and measured social scientific inquiry could provide insights for strengthening liberal democratic institutions in a way that could bypass the reliance on the state favored by an earlier generation. Thus, even while it

³⁶ Oren, *Our Enemies and US*, 23-46; see also Gunnell, “The Declination of the ‘State’ and the Origins of American Pluralism.”

³⁷ David Ciepley, *Liberalism in the Shadow of Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 39; and Ciepley, “Why the state was dropped in the first place,” 157-213.

continued to operate as a science for a liberal democratic state, its theoretical language underwent a change that downplayed the state's ability to initiate new policies contra society.

The political break represented by the war also brought with it a corresponding epistemic break, allowing for the reorientation of knowledge on a newly scientific paradigm motivated by a normative concern with understanding and strengthening the institutional arrangements of liberal societies. In Katznelson's words, it implied "creating a *political* science and a *political* history concerned with the dangers of mass politics" and of "secur[ing] its liberal regime against external and internal adversaries."³⁸ Within this context, the postwar demotion of the state concept from its place as the central object of political research fulfilled a twofold purpose.

First, it helped bolster the claim to scientificity, and thus value-neutrality, that distinguished the American social sciences from the ideological statism of both Nazism and Communism. Influential liberal thinkers of the time such as Karl Popper, Isaiah Berlin, and Friedrich Hayek not only identified state-worship as a common element of these ideologies, but associated them with a common metaphysical root in nineteenth century German political thought.³⁹ Under the influence of this new theorizing of totalitarianism, the normative dimension of the state concept was bracketed away in order to present political science as a value-free enterprise. If totalitarianism was a looming threat, adopting an implicit consensus on liberal democratic values was crucial for both the objective advancement of the social sciences and the strengthening of liberal democratic institutions. This, in turn, led the very concept of the state to appear as out of place within the scientific language of politics, being more appropriate for typifying totalitarian regimes rather than liberal-democratic ones.

³⁸ Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment*, 125.

³⁹ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* Vol. 2: *The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath* (London: Routledge, 1945); Isaiah Berlin, *Freedom and its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003 [1952]); F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994 [1944]).

Second, totalitarianism was seen as collapsing the traditional liberal distinction between state and society, by subjecting the latter to the former. In response, the postwar social sciences adopted the general attitude that a state autonomous from civil society was a pathology of authoritarianism rather than of liberal democracy. A renewed analytic and normative emphasis on civil society contra the state (for which the new behavioral approach was conducive) was crucial for the bolstering of liberal democracy against its enemies. As Oren writes, in the 1950s “the vision of America as a strong state in which technocratic elites scientifically controlled intergroup conflict and guided society toward progressive ends gave way to a vision of America as a strong society whose politics no longer needed to be rescued by apolitical, public-minded administrators.”⁴⁰ This new outlook was skeptical of the rise of “mass society,” of conformist attitudes, and of the public’s susceptibility to authoritarian charisma.⁴¹ However, it largely asserted that a liberal political system that was responsive to, and ultimately premised upon, a pluralistic civil society was the best bulwark against both the state autonomy that characterized authoritarian and totalitarian regimes and the mass politics that these regimes drew their legitimacy from.

Pluralism, behavioralism, and structural-functionalism were thus adopted as the preferred theoretical frameworks through which political scientists approached the questions of political behavior and institutions. In the process, the understanding of the United States as a relatively “stateless” polity lacking the centralization and autonomy that characterized the states of continental Europe gained new life. This myth of the “weak American state” was bolstered within political science and sociology by the reliance on theoretical paradigms that were largely

⁴⁰ Oren, *Our Enemies and US*, 12.

⁴¹ Desmond King and Marc Stears, “The Missing State in Postwar American Political Thought,” in *The Unsustainable American State*, 124. See also David M. Ricci, “Contradictions of a Political Discipline” in Farr and Seidelman, eds. *Discipline and History*, 165-178.

unwilling or incapable of scientifically conceptualizing an abstract social relationship like the state due to their empiricist leanings. Thus, even otherwise lucid and perceptive accounts of the state's multifaceted character, such as Nettl's years later, could not avoid reproducing the idea that the American state experience was of a fundamentally different character.

The principal takeaway from this puzzle of the state's absence from postwar political science is that the goal of scientifically studying the state by examining its institutions and behavior, as argued by Katznelson, also came with a *depoliticization*—and thus marginalization—of the state concept. The challenge of engaging with the state as a “genuinely political problem—that of political order understood in terms of authority and community” was shifted on to a different terrain, away from the contention over meaning that is inherent to discussions of the state as a cohesive entity and toward a value-free analysis that parceled it into its component parts.⁴² In effect, postwar political science was an attempt to establish a liberal social scientific discourse that neutralized the political and normative dimensions, as well as the rhetorical impact, of invoking “the state.” In turn, as I will argue in Chapter Two, this attempt to depoliticize the science of politics by excluding the discussion of the state became the target of critics of the discipline during the 1960s. And the impetus to develop a critique of political science by taking issue with its neglect of the state came as a result of the incorporation and appropriation of concurrent neo-Marxist accounts that had previously been excluded from the frameworks and language of mainstream political science.

III. Neo-Marxism and the Discipline

Existing reflections on the discipline occasionally acknowledge that, for a period of time during the late 1960s and 1970s, political science was characterized by a revival of interest in

⁴² Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*, 27.

Marxism, and especially in Marxist analyses of the state. However, there is almost unanimous consensus even from sympathetic observers that this intersection of ideas was a fairly brief engagement, and that its influence was limited. Stanley Aronowitz and Peter Bratsis note that “by 1985, *Bringing the State Back In*, the presumed benchmark for the return of the state as an object of inquiry to social science, had relegated theorists such as Miliband, Offe, Block, Therborn, and Poulantzas to a couple of paragraphs and footnotes.”⁴³ Mark Blyth concurs, claiming that the unwillingness of comparative politics scholars to wholly adopt European Marxism led them to find “refuge in a sanitized Poulanzian analysis of late capitalism called ‘state theory.’”⁴⁴ Similarly, for Leo Panitch, the critique of Marxist attempts to develop a theory of the capitalist state by those asserting the institutional autonomy of the state led to a “remarkable impoverishment of state theory.”⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Fred Block and Frances Fox Piven simply write that “political science weathered the period of rebellion in the 1960s with only minor modifications to the curriculum.”⁴⁶

Interpretations such as these first took hold in the late 1980s and were exacerbated by the declining prominence of Marxist politics and theory over the course of the 1990s and early 2000s. Their effect has been to write out the influence of Marxist political theory from the disciplinary history of political science, despite evidence to the contrary. For example, one account from the early 1980s actually noted the “remarkable growth of Marxism within American political science” that began as a response to pluralism during the 1960s; while toward the end of that decade, Fred

⁴³ Stanley Aronowitz and Peter Bratsis, “State Power, Global Power,” in ed. Stanley Aronowitz and Peter Bratsis, *Paradigm Lost: State Theory Reconsidered* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xii.

⁴⁴ Mark Blyth, “Great Punctuations: Prediction, Randomness, and the Evolution of Comparative Political Science,” *American Political Science Review* 100 (2006): 493-498.

⁴⁵ Leo Panitch, “The Impoverishment of State Theory,” in *Paradigm Lost: State Theory Reconsidered*, ed. Stanley Aronowitz and Peter Bratsis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 93.

⁴⁶ Fred Block and Frances Fox Piven, “Déjà Vu, All Over Again: A Comment on Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, “Winner Take-All Politics,” *Politics & Society* 38 (2010): 207.

Block could observe that a striking aspect of the revival of state theory was how “ideas and arguments that developed initially on the leftward fringes of American academic life are now part of mainstream discussions in political sociology and political science.”⁴⁷ One consequence of this disciplinary forgetting has been that the “return” to the state in political science that took hold in the 1980s is today largely characterized as the rediscovery of the Weberian understanding of the state as a set of administrative and coercive institutions. While this was undoubtedly the theoretical intent of the research agenda of *Bringing the State Back In*, I will argue that this was far from the only theoretical road available to scholars at the time; and that, in effect, the interpretations of the discipline’s trajectory today have largely glossed over this moment in favor of the narrative introduced at the time by the Committee on States and Social Structures.

In contrast, I will suggest that it was the reception and selective integration of Marxist debates concerning the capitalist state during the late 1960s-1970s that served as the basis for the renewed interest in the state within mainstream political science. At that time, books like Nicos Poulantzas’ *Political Power and Social Classes* (1968) and Ralph Miliband’s *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969), along with their debate in the pages of the *New Left Review*, brought forth a wave of neo-Marxist attempts to theorize the role of the capitalist state within postwar liberal-democratic regimes. This focus on theories of the state and democracy as stabilizing and legitimating forces was initially prompted by the success of these regimes during the “Glorious Thirty” years from the end of World War II until the early-1970s, as the joint management of national economies by governments and large corporations, coupled with neo-Keynesian economic policies, afforded them a broad legitimacy that quelled the potential of revolutionary

⁴⁷ Mark Kesselman, “From State Theory to Class Struggle and Compromise: Contemporary Marxist Political Studies,” *Social Science Quarterly* 64 (1983): 827; Fred Block, “State Theory in Context,” in *Revising State Theory: Essays in Politics and Postindustrialism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 22.

transformation.⁴⁸ Subsequently, the social, fiscal, and legitimacy crises of the mid-1970s and the restructuring of state-market relations that gave rise to contemporary “neoliberalism” led that same scholarship to dwell on the future of the welfare state in a time of structural transformation.⁴⁹

In Chapter Two, I will reconstruct how the Miliband-Poulantzas debate and the literature it spurred—what Margaret Levi characterized at the time as the “radical industry of the 1970s”—had made its way into the American context.⁵⁰ The debate provided many English-speaking scholars with their first introduction to contemporary Marxist theories of the state. At the time, scholars who wished to put forward an internal critique of the normative values and practices of behavioralism still largely drew upon variants of “elite theory” and “biased pluralism” grounded in the writings of C. Wright Mills and neo-Weberian sociology.⁵¹ In contrast, neo-Marxism advanced a unified methodological, theoretical, and political critique of both pluralism and elite theory, providing a more radical and innovative theoretical resource for a younger generation of scholars seeking an outside vantage point from which to challenge the existing knowledge practices of political science. Therefore, while the “new revolution in political science” (per APSA President David Easton) that emerged in the late 1960s through organizations such as the Caucus for a New Political Science and journals like *Politics & Society* actually predated by a

⁴⁸ Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2014), 1-2.

⁴⁹ Grega R. Krippner, *Capitalizing on Crisis: The Political Origins of the Rise of Finance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1-26.

⁵⁰ Margaret Levi, “Review of Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism.*” *The Journal of Economic History* 41 (1981): 716.

⁵¹ E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People: A Realist’s View of Democracy in America* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960); Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States* (W.W. Norton, 1969); Grant McConnell, *Private Power and American Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966); C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1956]). See also Mark Kesselman, “The Conflictual Evolution of American Political Science: From Apologetic Pluralism to Trilateralism and Marxism,” in J. David Greenstone, ed. *Public Values and Private Power in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 34-67.

few years the growing interest in Marxism, the latter quickly became the preferred framework for radical scholarship on the topic.

Marxist state theory thus provided a starting point from which critically-inclined scholars challenged the foundational and familiar topics of mainstream political science and its dominant frameworks, such as modernization theory and liberal pluralism. The late 1960s and the New Left saw a wide variety of radical and progressive discourses that challenged the liberal consensus, including new visions of participatory democracy, the black power movement, and second-wave feminism. However, Marxism stood out not only due to the longevity of its political and theoretical tradition, but also because of its prominence as the official ideology of the international communist movement. The intersection of Marxist political theory with parallel philosophical traditions such as structuralism, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis since the mid-1950s made reevaluating Marxism as a whole an especially pressing issue.

In effect, the revival of the state within political science was an epistemic shift that was sparked and influenced by the incorporation of a discourse that had previously been excluded from the discipline. But it was also precisely this past exclusion that, at the time, allowed this intellectual tradition to supply more novel conceptual and theoretical resources for analyzing the present and the proper role of social scientific research than the alternatives. Once transposed into the context of American political science and sociology, the discussions of the capitalist state became crucial theoretical resources for framing the initial problems pursued by state-oriented researchers within the discipline, and for questioning the normative values of liberal democracy and political science research in relation to the structural crises of the advanced industrialized democracies.

I will argue that through this initial engagement, Marxist political thought became a key interlocutor in a reconstruction of the discipline's self-perception during a moment in which its normative and analytical mission was up for debate. As I will show through detailed studies of two research initiatives, the Committee on States and Social Structures (Chapter Three) and Transitions from Authoritarian Rule (Chapter Four), the presence of those neo-Marxist debates during the 1960s and 1970s initially defined and shaped the boundaries of the discourse of the state within American political sociology and political science. The neo-Weberian accounts advanced by proponents of the statist revival unfolded against the background of these neo-Marxist discussions of the preceding decade and were largely formed in response to them. They adopted certain aspects of Marxist treatments of the state, including the language of state power and state autonomy, as well as the critique of economically-reductive connections between the state and the ruling class. At the same time, they deemphasized the class component of Marxist state theory, pointing toward the greater autonomy of politics in relation to society. In doing so, they constructed an updated discourse of state-centric research and a critique of the statelessness of past political science, thereby rendering it more compatible with the field's mainstream since the 1980s. As a consequence, the reception of Marxist political thought in the discipline led to the marginalization of its crucial political and normative elements, as it was subsumed and integrated into a newly formed narrative about the importance of the state to political science, in which it was now essentially relegated to a footnote.

However, even considering this marginalization, tracing this intellectual history also shows how neo-Marxist treatments of the state pointed toward certain themes and questions that were of little concern to the disciplinary mainstream. By virtue of the state being an essentially contested concept that is both the object and the precondition of political analysis, the

theorization of the state has always been a *political* act. I suggest that the unique contribution made by the neo-Marxist debates at the time was to bring this dimension of the state concept to the forefront. By approaching the state as an *object of theoretical and political practice*, neo-Marxist scholarship was, at its core, motivated by the goal of understanding the capitalist state in order to transform it.⁵² It is not a coincidence that the growing interest in the state within Marxist circles during the 1960s and the 1970s formed against the background of a broader concern among Western communist and socialist parties about the place of revolutionary politics within liberal-democratic institutions. (This dynamic will become more apparent in Chapter Four, which juxtaposes the Eurocommunist debates about the transition to socialism and the research on transitions from authoritarian rule within comparative democratization.) Therefore, in contrast to accounts from the time lamenting the academicization of Marxism, I suggest that these debates surrounding the capitalist state actually invigorated what had previously been a casualty of Communist theoretical orthodoxy and provided an effective critique of the latent biases of the social scientific mainstream.⁵³ In the process, they had reframed the links between discourses of the state and the production of political knowledge in a liberal political context—a relationship that we continue to grapple with today.

⁵² This point was originally made in Philip Abrams, “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1(1988): 58-89. Abrams sees this as an irresolvable tension that leads Marxism to reify the fiction of the state. However, I suggest that the goal of theorizing the state in order to act toward it politically (and thus to transform it) not only remains one of the most important contributions of the Marxist tradition, but also one that potentially bridges the distinction between facts and values at the heart of the modern social sciences.

⁵³ Perry Anderson’s *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1979) and Russell Jacoby’s *Dialectic of Defeat: Contours of Western Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) are two noteworthy examples from the time.

IV. Structure of the Dissertation

By approaching the disciplinary history of political science through the lens of the changing understandings of “the state,” I argue that attention to this concept’s place and usages in social scientific and theoretical discourse can help us become more self-reflexive about our relation to the forms of organized political power that we study. Through this reevaluation of the political science discipline in relation to the state concept, we can better understand how the field has defined its objects of study, its relation to them as a form of intellectual and political practice, and the ties between its knowledge-producing practices, normative values, and political action.

To make this overarching argument, I have divided the project into four substantive chapters, arranged roughly in chronological order. I have taken 1968 and 1989 as the demarcating years for describing the intellectual changes that took place within the discipline during that time, in part because of the symbolic political power of these years within the legacy of the twentieth century, and in part because these dates serve as important bookmarks in both the intellectual histories of American political science and of Marxist political thought. For the former, they represent the definitive end of the behavioral revolution and the emergence of critical perspectives on political science, culminating in the “post-paradigmatic” state of the discipline today. For the latter, these years capture the period between the intensification of the theoretical “crisis of Marxism” and the political collapse of the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe. As I will elaborate in the Conclusion, these dates also continue to loom large within the contemporary political imagination, as the symbols of a transitional period in the history of modern liberalism that is now itself possibly coming to a close.

In Chapter One, I provide the necessary backstory to the state’s reemergence in the 1970s as an attempted paradigm shift in the discipline, arguing that political science can be

characterized by its ambiguous relationship to the state—a concept upon which it has been both dependent on for its disciplinary identity and coherence, yet also incapable of adequately defining and studying. The purpose of that chapter is to provide a general overview of the state concept from the formation of American political science in the late nineteenth century to the behavioral revolution of the 1950s-60s, emphasizing the degree to which it has been a contested concept in the discipline. When transposed to the United States during the mid-nineteenth century, German *Staatswissenschaft* placed the state the heart of the nascent American science of politics. This tradition was dealt a decisive blow after World War I, giving way to new models of scholarship that privileged empirical research over the approaches that became associated with the “Teutonic” lineage of the state concept, and which sought to disaggregate the political phenomena previously grouped under the unifying notion of the state into its component parts: particular institutions, groups, and individuals. From the 1920s to the height of the behavioral revolution in the 1950s, the state lost much of its prominence as an object of study. By tracing this conceptual arc, my goal in this chapter is to emphasize how the state’s indefinite character factored into its declining prominence as an object of study within the discipline through the first half of the twentieth century, thereby creating the preconditions for it to be brought back in after the emergence of internal critiques and disputes within the field.

In Chapter Two, I concentrate on the parallel trajectory of the state as an object of study within Marxist political theory, and the reception of this scholarship into the context of American political science. I demonstrate that beginning in the early 1960s, a neo-Marxist discourse of the state took form through a series of exchanges—first with the critique of liberal pluralism initially developed by C. Wright Mills and Ralph Miliband, and subsequently with the Miliband-Poulantzas debate and the growing prominence of structuralist and class-struggle theories of the

state. In tracing the reception of Marxist state theory into American political science, I pay specific attention to the cross-fertilization between these competing discourses of politics, and the overlaps and disjunctures in their resulting conceptions of the state. I argue that neo-Marxism provided a new theoretical language through which certain camps within the discipline could initiate a self-evaluation and critique. These theoretical debates within neo-Marxism allowed for the question of the state and of political power to be placed on the table in ways that previous theories did not allow. In the process, this discourse supplied the conceptual and theoretical resources to once again speak of the state as an object of analysis, and provided a distinct theoretical vantage point from which a cohesive and self-reflexive narrative about the discipline as a whole could be constructed. In sum, via the integration of Marxism, a revitalized discourse of the state became a tool through which an interrogation of disciplinary knowledge practices and the reevaluation of the normative and epistemic foundations of political science could be conducted.

In Chapters Three and Four, I continue this narrative by concentrating on two research initiatives concerning the state that were made possible by the integration of Marxism into American political science discussed in the previous chapter. By the late 1970s, the reception of neo-Marxist theories of the state and politics had prompted a revival of interest in the state concept within the disciplinary mainstream, to the extent that the theme of the 1981 annual APSA conference became “Restoring the State to Political Science.” I have thus far argued that this revival spoke to a need to capture some aspect of social reality that available concepts could not. By pointing to the absence of interest in the state by behavioral and pluralist scholars, political scientists influenced by neo-Marxism and critical theory during the 1970s understood this blind spot to be a function of the ideologically liberal and empiricist biases of contemporary

social science. Subsequently, the reinterpretation and reconstruction of the disciplinary identity of political science in light of the renewed interest in the state took place through a selection process in which Marxist ideas were both integrated *and demarcated from* disciplinary knowledge.

In Chapter Three I concentrate on the Committee for States and Social Structures, a research initiative sponsored by the Social Science Research Council that was explicitly concerned with “bringing the state back in” to political science, and which officially existed from 1983 to 1990. Through archival research analyzing the Committee’s planning documents for the project, as well as the published work of the movement’s key advocates such as Theda Skocpol, I argue that it was engaged in a dialogue with recent Marxist theories of the state, whose initial critique of pluralism and attempts to theorize the relationship between politics and society in a non-reductive manner provided much of the starting point for the Committee’s arguments. At the same time, the Committee also used that scholarship as a foil through which to advance its own, more neo-Weberian understanding of the state, thereby undercutting much of the Marxist literature’s critical outlook and contributing to the theoretical isolation and decline of that framework within political science.

In Chapter Four, I examine the Woodrow Wilson Center’s project *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*. Convened as three annual conferences between 1979 and 1981, and eventually published in an edited four-volume series in 1986, *Transitions* was a foundational research initiative for the field of comparative democratization. This project was conducted against the background of the rise of authoritarianism in Latin America and the transitions to liberal democracy in Southern Europe. Although subsequent evaluations of *Transitions* emphasized its focus on political agency rather than on the structural causes of democratization, I

argue that the project cannot be understood apart from both the contemporary debates on the state and neo-Marxism. In particular, these shared motivations and concerns become apparent when examining the writings of one of the project's chief organizers, Guillermo O'Donnell, both prior to and after his involvement with the project, as well as against the background of concurrent neo-Marxist and Communist debates on regime change and the transition to socialism in Southern Europe.

As Chapters Three and Four will show, both research agendas incorporated certain aspects of contemporary Marxist theory to question existing accounts of the discipline's evolution and its predominant theoretical frameworks. In effect, they challenged and reconstructed the disciplinary past by treating the state as the lens through which a reevaluation of the relationship between political science and social reality could be grasped. By invoking the Marxist critique of the discipline, the movement to "bring the state back in" to political science discussed in Chapter Three framed its intervention as an overt return to a concept that had been neglected by both liberal-pluralist and neo-Marxist accounts, which in its eyes, had been equally societally-reductive. Less overtly, the concurrent scholarship on transitions from authoritarian rule discussed in Chapter Four took an interest in the state as a crucial object of knowledge for understanding the dynamics by which liberal democratic regimes could emerge, but emphasized the importance of political rather than structural forces for these processes. In both cases, the state was again treated as a theoretical object about which knowledge could be produced; and its existence as a social fact was reproduced not just in theoretical discourse, but also through material practices within the discipline—through the establishment of research committees, conferences, and scholarly publications.

The growing awareness within political science of neo-Marxism played a major role in the reorientation of the field toward comparative-historical analysis, but also toward a renewed concern with the state as a critical standpoint from which an alternative narrative of the discipline's progress and blind spots could be formed.⁵⁴ Yet it will also become apparent in Chapters Three and Four, as well as in the Conclusion, that while this scholarship began from a number of the questions raised by neo-Marxism, the reception of these theories was usually presented as a move away from abstract functionalism and toward institutionalist models that could better capture the agency of individuals and groups, and historical contingency.⁵⁵ The result was a selective appropriation that presented Marxist political theory as an important but insufficient paradigm, and which largely removed the critical and practical dimensions of engaging with the question of the state that preoccupied the Marxist scholarship of the 1970s.

Despite this partial and imperfect appropriation, the disciplinary "rediscovery" of the state cannot be understood independently of the neo-Marxist paradigms about the state, which not only made a novel and important theoretical contribution, but also facilitated a lasting internal transformation within the history of American political science. In the Conclusion, I will discuss the consequences of this intellectual shift for the present, suggesting that the contemporary crises of liberalism have once again made the state (and its history) a timely and important topic of discussion, and have also confronted us with the question of the relationship between social science and political practice. Therefore, the hope is that treating the "return" to the state as a symptom of the knowledge-practice nexus at the center of modern political science can serve as a case study for how disciplinary identities and knowledge are formulated,

⁵⁴ See Ira Katznelson, "Strong Theory, Complex History: Structure and Configuration in Comparative Politics Revisited," in *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, ed. Mark Lichbach and Alan Zuckerman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵⁵ Rianne Mahon, "From 'Bringing' to 'Putting': The State in Late Twentieth-Century Social Theory," *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* 16 (1991): 120.

reproduced, and contested. More importantly, this example from the recent past may provide us with ongoing lessons for thinking through the *political* element of political science, as a discourse of power and a commentary on the present.

Chapter One: The State in the History of Political Science

“Political science begins and ends with the state.”

- J.W. Garner, *Political Science and Government*, 1910

“Neither the state nor power is a concept that serves to bind together political research.”

- David Easton, *The Political System*, 1953

This chapter provides a cursory overview of the way that the state has been treated within American political science prior to the revival of interest in the concept that took place in the second half of the twentieth century. This account cannot be exhaustive of the way that the state has been conceptualized and utilized by numerous generations of political scientists. Rather, by recapping the history of the state concept as a series of revisions, from the metaphysical way of conceptualizing community during its early period, to the pluralist and behavioral critiques of the state, and finally to the neo-statist call to bring the state back in to political science, I wish to highlight key theoretical shifts in the disciplinary matrix of political science. By doing so, my goal is to provide the historical background for the following chapters, where I will address the development and appropriation of neo-Marxist conceptions of the state into the discipline beginning in the 1960s.

In the following pages, I discuss the gradual shift of the state concept from occupying the central place in the early decades of the discipline to its margins by the 1960s, over the course of three stages. Initially the state was conceived as the transcendental expression of political communities as they developed through history; this understanding was clearly influenced by German *Staatswissenschaft* and introduced to the United States via the writings of Francis Lieber and his followers. By the late nineteenth century, the influence of pragmatist and pluralist

philosophies, as well as the adoption of new scientific techniques for the research of public opinion and group psychology, led to the first concerted critiques of the state concept in the years following World War I from the Anglo-American pluralist camp. Although the pluralist critique was short lived, the state concept persisted under increasing pressure, even as the influx of Central European academics who came as refugees in the 1930s and 1940s provided a new link for the discipline to the European intellectual heritage. Building on this momentum of skepticism about the state, the publication of David Easton's *The Political System* in 1953 served as a watershed moment, inaugurating the first stages of the behavioral revolution (and a subsequent revival of pluralist theory) that almost completely pushed the state concept to the margins.

By tracing this disciplinary history, my second goal is to provide a contrast between these earlier engagements with the state concept and the subsequent scholarship postdating the 1970s, which will constitute the main focus of subsequent chapters. The crucial difference is the relative absence up to that point of a concerted engagement with the Marxist tradition, as it was developing along its own trajectory parallel, but unincorporated to, the discipline. As a result, theorizing about the state over the course of that time, up to and including the behavioral revolution, developed largely as a complement to liberal conceptions of civil society, representative government, and individual rights rather than a critique of these assumptions. In the words of Katznelson and Milner, for much of the history of political science in America, “the impulse to study the state was associated to some extent with the desire to control and contain the state by civil society.”¹ In contrast, the absorption of Marxist debates about the state into the discipline allowed for an epistemic shift in the questions raised about familiar topics such as democracy and liberalism, modernization, and the relationship between politics, society, and social power.

¹ Katznelson and Milner, *Political Science: State of the Discipline*, 8.

I. Disciplinary Beginnings

The ambiguous relationship of American political science to the concept of the state can be traced to the first half of the nineteenth century. Even before its consolidation into an academic discipline, as early as 1838 when Francis Lieber published his *Manual of Political Ethics*—“the first systematic treatise on the state in American political science”—the state was taken up as the object of the study of politics.² In the words of one author, the state was “the single most prevalent conception borrowed by American political scientists from the Germans.”³ In particular it was Lieber, a Prussian émigré vested in the tradition of *Staatswissenschaft*, who helped establish the notion of the state as a historical entity representing the community or the people.⁴ One could find in Lieber’s 1838 text a multifaceted description of the state as a jural society “founded on the relations of right;” as the “natural state of man;” as a “society of moral beings;” and as existing “for the better obtaining of the true ends of each individual, and of society collectively.”⁵ Following Lieber, similar descriptions would become common in the study of politics over the course of the century.

The rapid branching out of the social sciences alongside the growth of the American university system in the second half of the nineteenth century posed before these new fields the problem of epistemic foundations.⁶ For nascent disciplines like sociology, economics, and

² James Farr, “Political Science and the State,” in *Discipline and History*, ed. James Farr and Raymond Seidelman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 72.

³ Sylvia D. Fries, “Staatstheorie and the New American Science of Politics,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34 (1973): 393.

⁴ Farr, “The Historical Science(s) of Politics: The Principles, Association, and Fate of an American Discipline,” in *Modern Political Science: Anglo-American Exchanges Since 1880*, ed. Robert Adcock, Mark Bevir, and Shannon C. Stimson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). On Lieber, see also Bernard Edward Brown, *American Conservatives: The Political Thought of Francis Lieber and John W. Burgess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951).

⁵ Francis Lieber, *Manual of Political Ethics* (Philadelphia: J.B Lippincott, 1911): 152, 162.

⁶ Peter T. Manicas, “The Social Science Disciplines: The American Model,” in *Discourses on Society: The Shaping of the Social Science Disciplines*, eds. Peter Wagner, Björn Wittrock, and Richard Whitley (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991): 45-72; Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (New York:

political science, establishing a disciplinary foundation meant, first and foremost, delineating the boundaries of what would be their respective objects of study. From the initial period of its early history, American political science was a state-oriented endeavor, importing the concept from more established disciplines like jurisprudence, history, and political philosophy. The earlier generations of scholars—among which we may include German-trained figures like Lieber, Theodore Woolsey, William Dunning, and John Burgess, as well as others like James Garner and Westel Willoughby—placed the state at the center of their analyses. Approaching their subject matter from a historical and comparative perspective, the focus of this literature was overwhelmingly on the formal and juridical study of institutions, public administration, and public law. Behind this constellation was the state, which these authors, in varying ways, understood as a form of organized political life linked to national history, and the expression of particular normative ideals and principles.⁷

The early literature on the state treated it not simply as a conceptual object for analysis, but as a historical subject undergoing a process of change. By 1886, Munroe Smith, a professor of jurisprudence at Columbia University and one of the founders of *Political Science Quarterly* (the first journal of political science), would note that the state “is rapidly becoming, if it is not already, the central factor of social evolution.”⁸ This perspective, which was shared by other influential political scientists such as Burgess and Woolsey, treated it as a historical constant of

Cambridge University Press, 1991); Dorothy Ross, “Changing Contours of the Social Science Disciplines,” in *The Cambridge History of Science*, Vol. 7: *The Modern Social Sciences*, eds. Theodore M. Porter and Dorothy Ross (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 205-237; Stephen T. Leonard, “The Pedagogical Purposes of a Political Science,” in *Political Science in its History: Research Programs and Political Traditions*, eds. James Farr, John S. Dryzek, and Stephen T. Leonard (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 66-99.

⁷ Farr, “The Historical Science(s) of Politics,” 75. Although cf. Theodore Dwight Woolsey, *Political Science, or the State Theoretically and Practically Considered* (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1889), 142: “The characteristic which attaches to the nation is a sense of union springing out of inner causes, while a state need imply nothing more than an external connection.”

⁸ Quoted in Katznelson and Milner, *Political Science*, 9.

civilized society, yet one that was in the process of an inevitable and natural growth from infancy to maturity, from tribal association to city-state to the modern nation state.⁹ For Burgess, echoing Hegel, the state was “the product of the progressive revelation of the human reason through history,” and its universal human purpose was “the perfection of humanity; the civilization of the world; the perfect development of the human reason, and its attainment to universal command over individualism; the apotheosis of man.”¹⁰ Not all appeals to the state as the representative of the national community relied on the quasi-idealist language of Lieber and Burgess. Woolsey, for example, defined the state as “the body or community which thus, by permanent law, through its organs, administers justice within certain limits of territory.”¹¹ Yet even such a concise and “proto-Weberian” definition came with a metaphysical flourish that described the state as “the means for all the highest ends of man and of society.”¹²

This literature also tended to draw a crucial distinction between state and government.¹³ Burgess saw this distinction as the “most important question of political science and constitutional law,” writing that “the political scientists and the statesmen have yet to solve...this question of the permanent organization of the state distinct from the organization of the government and in possession of complete sovereignty over both the individual and the government.”¹⁴ Burgess argued that the American Revolution allowed the American people to

⁹ Jens Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*, 49-50.

¹⁰ John W. Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, Vol. I (New York: Baker and Taylor, 1890), 67, 85; see also Wilfred M. McClay, “John W. Burgess and the Search for Cohesion in American Political Thought,” *Polity* 26 (1993): 51-73.

¹¹ Woolsey, *Political Science*, 140.

¹² Woolsey, *Political Science*, 198.

¹³ A notable exception is Woodrow Wilson, who in his 1899 book *The State* denied this separation between state and government, seeing those elected elites in control of the government as the state themselves; see James Farr, “Political Science,” in *The Cambridge History of Science*, Vol. 7: *The Modern Social Sciences*, ed. Theodore Porter and Dorothy Ross (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 309.

¹⁴ Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, 173, 58.

see “the state organized outside of, and supreme over, the government,” thereby providing them with “objective aids and supports...by which to guide our science.”¹⁵ While he noted that some found the traditional principle of state sovereignty (in particular, that it was supreme and indivisible) difficult to accept, he attributed this hesitation to their inability to distinguish between state and government.¹⁶ If the state was an all-comprehensive, exclusive, permanent, and sovereign entity, then government was in contrast a limited institutional agent. Dangers to individual liberty could emerge from an unlimited power vested in government, but this did not amount to despotism on the higher level of the state, since “from the standpoint of the idea the state is mankind viewed as an organized unit,” and from that same standpoint, “the state can be separated in idea from any particular form of organization.”¹⁷

The distinction between state and government also reinforced a new discursive framework allowing scholars to establish a transcendental conceptual referent. As Jens Bartelson has insightfully pointed out, early political scientists “were able to speak of the state both as an outcome of evolution (and hence something that must have arisen at a certain time and in a certain place) and as a transhistorically present medium of such political evolution (and hence as something that exists always and everywhere)” at the same time.¹⁸ This projection of the modern state backwards into human history—or put differently, the reconstruction of human history through the lens of the modern state—gave scholars the scientific legitimacy they sought for their discipline by allowing them to construct a historical and theoretical discourse centered on a “modern” concept.

¹⁵ Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, 70.

¹⁶ Burgess *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, 52-58. Also see Gunnell, “The Declination of the State and the Origins of American Pluralism,” in *Political Science in its History*, 21.

¹⁷ Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, 50, 49.

¹⁸ Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*, 52.

However, this also had implications for what political science would come to be as a practical state-building and state-oriented science.¹⁹ From the beginning, political science could hardly establish itself as a discipline organized around the state if it was purely metaphysical. As an “indispensable nexus” between concept and reality, it was crucial for the discipline’s survival that an American state actually existed as a prominent public object that could be studied.²⁰ “The national popular state” wrote Burgess, “alone furnishes the objective reality upon which political science can rest in the construction of a truly scientific political system.”²¹ The scholarly efforts to gather and systematize available knowledge on states and their institutions through a historical and comparative lens had an explicit public purpose—to help understand the latent patterns of historical development which would, in the words of APSA’s first President Frank Goodnow, contribute to the “realization of State will.”²² Illustrating the nascent discipline’s place at the forefront of the Progressive movement, the early leadership of APSA included many proponents of a strong, industrialized state and a developed, modernized economy who wanted to use political science to contribute to “the establishment of a unitary national state accompanied by a virtuous national citizenry.”²³ Conceptualizing politics through the state gave political science its justification for existing—and insofar as political science existed as a discipline, its public mission was to further the political ends of the state, and thereby to identify the science of politics as something conducive to the public good.

Not surprisingly, this affinity to a strong national state raised questions about the relationship of coercive authority to liberal practices like consent, toleration, representation, and

¹⁹ Leonard, “The Pedagogical Purposes of a Political Science,” in *Political Science in its History*, 66-99.

²⁰ Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*, 79.

²¹ Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, 58.

²² Quoted in Dryzek, “Revolutions Without Enemies: Key Transformations in Political Science,” 488.

²³ Dryzek, “Revolutions Without Enemies: Key Transformations in Political Science,” 487.

individual rights.²⁴ In one sense, the attempts of figures like Lieber and Burgess to theorize national community through the language of the state did not gain much traction for the very reason that such a language was uncommon in American political discourse.²⁵ Yet this statist discourse did have an important political implication, in that it expressed an aristocratic liberal suspicion of democratic politics. As Farr notes, “The ‘state’ met the conceptual demands of scholars searching for general theory and the political aspirations of a professional class alarmed by popular excitements in a democratic age.”²⁶ Behind the discourse of the state as the representative of a national community was an elitist fear of the rise of the masses.²⁷

While academic political science emerged in the United States against the background of a growing militant labor movement and the gradual spread of socialist ideas, the latter were not an academic interlocutor in the social sciences.²⁸ On the rare occasions that communist and socialist ideas drew scholarly attention, such as in Woolsey’s 1880 book *Communism and Socialism in their History and Theory*, the sentiment expressed was concern for the impact that

²⁴ Lieber was concerned both about the threat that a democratic majority and a powerful state could pose to the individual; see Brown, *American Conservatives*, 72-100; and Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science*, 37-42.

²⁵ McClay, “John W. Burgess and the Search for Cohesion in American Political Thought.” Farr (“Political Science and the State”) notes that while the notion of the state was not absent in American political discourse prior to Lieber’s contribution, it carried a rather different meaning—more as popular sovereignty and shared values than the national community as a historical subject.

²⁶ Farr, “Political Science,” 309.

²⁷ As Brown (*American Conservatives*, 174) writes, “German liberalism...provided an ideology consonant with the interests of a growing middle class which wanted freedom to pursue its economic and cultural activity.”

²⁸ See Dorothy Ross, “Socialism and American Liberalism: Academic Social Thought in the 1880s,” *Perspectives in American History* 11 (1977-78): 7-79; Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States* (New York: Verso 1987); and Brian Lloyd, *Left Out: Pragmatism, Exceptionalism, and the Poverty of American Marxism, 1890-1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), especially Ch. 3. Of course, some exceptions can be found. One is E.R.A. Seligman’s *The Economic Interpretation of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1907), a work that, while not Marxist in its politics, was influenced by its insights. Another is Louis Boudin’s *The Theoretical System of Karl Marx* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1907)—a response to Seligman in defense of Marx. Both works were subsequently cited in Henry Jones Ford’s *The Natural History of the State: An Introduction to Political Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1915).

socialism would have on the fabric of the American community. The abolition of private property would transform the state from a “great community” into an organization that “should usurp the most important functions of society” and that would constantly enforce its judgments through coercion.²⁹ The state would not wither away, but instead “have all the powers now distributed through society in their highest potency.”³⁰ Woolsey continued: “What the form of the state in its socialistic era would be is of little importance. The essential characteristic is that it must become all but unlimited [...] all unlimited governments are more like one another, whether they be called monarchies or oligarchies or democracies, than they are each like to a limited government of their own name.”³¹ The prospect of socialism in America thus raised the fear of a despotic and unlimited state that would forcefully subordinate civil society to its whims—an inversion of power in a nation that, since Tocqueville, had thought society to be far stronger than the state.³²

Even if Charles Merriam, looking backwards from 1920, could write that “while the socialist theory of the state was at no time or place widely adopted, nevertheless, it deeply influenced the general course of political thought in America,” its influence was mostly felt among workers, activists, union officials and progressive politicians rather than in the more insular academy.³³ Perhaps the closest link between Marxism and American political science in the late nineteenth century was Daniel DeLeon, who began his academic career in the late 1870s as Burgess’s student at Columbia University Law School. Subsequently, DeLeon served as a lecturer at Columbia’s School of Political Science between 1883 and 1889 (founded by Burgess

²⁹ Theodore Dwight Woolsey, *Communism and Socialism in their History and Theory* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1880), 7, 270.

³⁰ Woolsey, *Communism and Socialism*, 13.

³¹ Woolsey, *Communism and Socialism*, 232.

³² Dorothy Ross, “Anglo-American Political Science, 1880-1920” in *Modern Political Science*, 30.

³³ Charles Merriam, *American Political Ideas: Studies in the Development of American Political Thought 1865-1917* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 357.

in 1881 as an emulation of the German university model, emphasizing the study of politics and the state from a historical, juristic, and constitutional lens).³⁴ Despite this overlap, it is unlikely that the young DeLeon, whose political sympathies were at the time closer to Henry George than Karl Marx, could have had any influence on Burgess's thinking before being pushed out of academia in the late 1880s due to his political views. As a socialist activist, DeLeon would go on to criticize political scientists' fixation on the state, which he saw as a "central directing body" whose function is not productive but oppressive, not administrative but political."³⁵ Thus, DeLeon rejected state management of industry in the name of socialism, and criticized socialist support for the nationalization of industries due to the exploitative nature of the state-capital alliance.³⁶ Yet although DeLeon was among the most prominent advocates for a Marxist conception of the state in the American context of the time, his influence did not extend beyond a fraction of the American socialist movement. Therefore, Marxist ideas were largely excluded from these formative years of the discipline, remaining the theoretical language of activists rather than professional scholars.³⁷

In the nineteenth century the state thus became the focal point of a concerted scientific effort to systematically study political order, and was invoked as the concept that would lend the nascent discipline a coherence and common point of reference. As Bartelson writes, "the concept of the state not only provided the focal object of that science, but was also a condition of its

³⁴ Fries, "Staatstheorie and the New American Science of Politics," 395. On DeLeon's relationship to Burgess, see L. Glen Seretan, *Daniel DeLeon: The Odyssey of an American Marxist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 12-15.

³⁵ Daniel DeLeon, "The Capitalist State" *Daily People* 8, no. 54 (Aug. 23, 1905).

³⁶ Daniel DeLeon, "State Socialism" *Daily People* 11, no. 232 (Feb. 17, 1911); "State Socialism—Take Warning!" *The People* 3, no. 40 (Dec. 31, 1894); "State Capitalism" *The People* Vol. 7, no. 22 (Aug. 29, 1897).

³⁷ For a more extensive discussion of this topic, see Rafael Khachaturian, "Statist Political Science and American Marxism: A Historical Encounter," *Contemporary Political Theory* (16 November 2016): 1-21.

being distinctively ‘political’ and ‘scientific.’”³⁸ In the process, it effectively became the placeholder for a variety of practices and social relationships that took on the quality of being “political.”

II. From Progressivism to Crisis

Formulated from the intersection of history, jurisprudence, moral philosophy, and statecraft, political science in the United States was always oriented to a public role. If its original mission was to strengthen the state, this was in response to the Madisonian system of checks and balances, which in the eyes of social reformers stalled progressive change and did not reflect the dynamism of social life in the turn of the century United States.³⁹ The fledgling discipline’s aspiration to have a public role in creating an active and centralized state (an entity crucial to its own existence) almost naturally tasked scholars with studying how specific state institutions operated. The increasing scrutiny of the state concept over the next few decades illustrates what Katznelson and Milner have identified as the “quest to understand the state at a lower, more realistic, and behavioral level of abstraction.”⁴⁰ This goal, in turn, was closely tied to the ideological imperatives of American liberalism, namely “the identification of rules based on civic and political rights to restrict potentially predatory state actors and to make the modern state permeable to the power and choices of members of society.”⁴¹

The historicist conception of the state that early American political science inherited from the German tradition lent it conservative overtones of holism and gradual, incremental change.⁴²

³⁸ Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*, 182-183.

³⁹ Dryzek, “Revolutions Without Enemies,” 488.

⁴⁰ Katznelson and Milner, *Political Science*, 6.

⁴¹ Katznelson and Milner, *Political Science*, 5.

⁴² This is not to say that *Staatslehre* was entirely conservative. On the history of liberalism in Germany, see for example Leonard Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom: History of a Political Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); James J. Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth*

Yet the interim period between the founding of APSA in 1903 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914 marked the beginning of a shift in the discipline that would have enormous repercussions on the place of the state within its discourse. During that time, the view of the state as representing a higher principle of popular sovereignty or the nation was gradually eroded in favor of new research agendas that emphasized individual psychology, an evolutionary, process-based view of social development, and experimental and pragmatic forms of inquiry.⁴³ When in 1890 Burgess claimed that a democratic state can only exist if the mass of the population shares a “consensus of opinion,” “a common psychological standpoint and habit,” and “have risen, in their mental development, to the consciousness of a state,” he was inadvertently foreshadowing the basic concerns of the next generation of political scientists.⁴⁴ Aided by the nascent fields of sociology and psychology, they began to inquire into the individual-level bases of democratic legitimacy, consent, and public opinion.

The founding of APSA can be seen as a moment in which political science was demarcated for good from its closest companion in the human sciences up till then—history. By that point, the newly established profession was already increasingly concerned with studying the processes that mediated between the people and government, such as elections, representation, and legislative behavior. The reformist social philosophy of the Progressive era, which emphasized elite technocracy, dovetailed with pragmatist philosophies calling for experimental social reform and civic engagement. In turn, this shift eroded the rationale for distinguishing between state and government that once was key for the efforts to establish a

Century (The University of Chicago Press, 1978); and Peter C. Caldwell, *Popular Sovereignty and the Crisis of German Constitutional Law: The Theory and Practice of Weimar Constitutionalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997): 1-39.

⁴³ See Farr, “The Historical Science(s) of Politics.”

⁴⁴ Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, 81-82.

systematic science of politics.⁴⁵ Whereas the use of the term “state” up till that point indicated that political communities were subject to their own unique dynamics of socio-historical evolution, bringing the term closer to meaning with government now implied that the political order could be within the reach of technocratic and experimental reform. Attempting to study and explain the state through the analysis of group interests and functions provided theoretical legitimacy to the science of politics in the Progressive era, which blended political engagement with an appeal to scientific rigor; it also reinforced the Progressive movement’s democratic imaginary by placing “the people” at the center of the study of government institutions.⁴⁶

One early example of this approach was Arthur Bentley’s *The Process of Government*. Under the influence of Deweyan pragmatism, Bentley attempted to disaggregate the state by re-conceptualizing it as a process of interaction between government and citizens, in which groups with specific social interests competed for representation in the public arena.⁴⁷ The state, defined by Bentley as “the sum of the activities comprised within the intermediate sense of the word, government” was “no factor in our investigation. It is like the ‘social whole’: we are not interested in it as such, but exclusively in the processes within it.”⁴⁸ Instead, Bentley would write that “all phenomena of government are phenomena of groups pressing one another, forming one another, and pushing out new groups and group representatives (the organs or agencies of government) to mediate the adjustments. It is only as we isolate these activities, determine their representative values, and get the whole process stated in terms of them, that we approach to a

⁴⁵ For example, Woolsey in *Communism and Socialism* (229) distinguished between “the governments under which the socialists hope to carry out their industrial theory, and the *form of state polity* which the theory itself seems to render necessary.”

⁴⁶ Farr, “Political Science,” 314.

⁴⁷ Katznelson and Milner, *Political Science*, 12.

⁴⁸ Arthur F. Bentley, *The Process of Government: A Study of Social Pressures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1908), 263.

satisfactory knowledge of government.”⁴⁹ Rather than critiquing the state outright, Bentley sidestepped the question by defining it as a topic beyond the conceptual bounds of his study, and instead discussed government as a process. This subtle change, however, later proved important, as the rediscovery of Bentley in the 1950s allowed figures like David Truman to outline a new conception of the scientific study of politics—one that was best formulated through clear and verifiable propositions rather than the normative discourse previously associated with the state concept.⁵⁰

Bentley’s skepticism about seeing the state through the metaphysical lens of sovereignty also anticipated the pluralist critiques of the state that emerged by way of a trans-Atlantic dialogue between British and American progressives.⁵¹ It is possible to identify two related yet distinct strands of pluralism that took hold in Anglo-American political science between World War I and the 1930s. The first is the normative discourse developed in the writings of scholars like Harold Laski, G.D.H Cole, R.H Tawney, Mary Parker Follett, and George Catlin; the second is a more empirically-based pluralism, primarily associated with the research agenda of Charles Merriam and his “Chicago School” of political science.

At the center of normative pluralism was a progressive critique of the myth of the state and a defense of the autonomy of associational life.⁵² Laski, the most prolific of the anti-statists, drew upon the works of Otto von Gierke, Ernest Barker, and J. Neville Figgis in order to trace the hold that statism had had on Western political thought. One of the main contradictions of the statist doctrines held by Burgess and his contemporaries vested in *Staatstheorie* was their

⁴⁹ Bentley, *The Process of Government*, 269.

⁵⁰ Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*, 98.

⁵¹ See Marc Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists and the Problems of the State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1998).

⁵² See Gunnell, “The Declination of the ‘State’ and the Origins of American Pluralism.”

inability to reconcile their view of the sovereign state as the origin and final arbiter of positive law with the Anglo-American tradition that saw civil law as originating prior to the state with individual consent.⁵³ Although his primary targets were British Hegelians like F.H. Bradley and Bernard Bosanquet, Laski denied that the state had any overriding claim on the loyalties of its citizens. Taken to its conclusion, the theory meant that the state was grounded entirely upon individual consent; “The only ground upon which the individual can give or be asked his support for the state is from the conviction that what it is aiming at is, in each particular action, good.”⁵⁴ The state needed to justify itself by its consequences and achievements, relative to how well it met the expectations of its citizens. Only if it derived its law from normative principles which were located beyond itself, and which were in accordance with the judgment of its citizens, could it make any morally valid claim upon their allegiance.

Laski’s attempt to de-mystify the state also led him to draw a contrast between it and government. While the concept of the state represented a kind of metaphysical abstraction of personality, it also masked the much more concrete phenomenon of government, where in every state some individuals exercise power over others. The doctrine of state sovereignty was merely “a method of conferring formal power upon men to whom functions of a special kind have been entrusted...The distinction between state and government was nothing more than the means of obtaining a sanction for the norms imposed by the government upon the community.”⁵⁵ In this manner, Laski argued, the idea of the state came to act as a metaphysical and philosophical

⁵³ Fries, “Staatstheorie and the New American Science of Politics.”

⁵⁴ Laski, *Authority in the Modern State* (Kitchener: Batoche, 2000 [1917]), 17.

⁵⁵ Harold Laski, “Law and the State,” in *Studies in Law and Politics* (Routledge, 2009 [1932]), 269, 270.

justification for the concrete political phenomenon of government possessing the ability to exercise coercive power over society.⁵⁶

Rather than challenging the existence of the state on the grounds of it being a meta-theoretical construct, these critiques further reified the state by treating it as constitutive of modern political life.⁵⁷ Their inadvertent reproduction of the state even by its critics added to the general lack of consensus on the term's meaning. One study conducted in 1931 had identified at least 145 different definitions of the state, with less than half of them being in agreement.⁵⁸ Dissatisfaction with both the old legacy of the concept and with the normative pluralist critique—both of which saw the state through a juridical lens—led to calls for studying “not only the theory of the legal state but the discussion of the actual power to enforce and of the original organization of that power.”⁵⁹ Expressing this view in his 1934 book *The State as a Concept of Political Science*, Frederick Mundell Watkins suggested that it is “extremely doubtful whether a realistic political science can afford to remain content with a concept of the state defined in terms of legal sovereignty and the monopoly of power.”⁶⁰ In order to be compatible with a more realistic political science, the concepts of state and sovereignty needed to serve as “instruments for the comparison of objectively given social data.”⁶¹ In turn, the study of this objective social

⁵⁶ With this formulation Laski came close to the Marxist position of thinking the state as a partially ideological veil for the actual institutions of coercive power over society. As he underwent an intellectual shift towards Marxism beginning in the late 1920s, he is one of a handful of Anglo-American political scientists during this period who seriously engaged with Marxist thought. For example see, *Karl Marx: An Essay* (London: The Fabian Society, 1922); *Communism* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1927), especially Ch. IV, “The Communist Theory of the State”; and his “Introduction to *The Communist Manifesto*” (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1948), 49-111.

⁵⁷ Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*, 84.

⁵⁸ Charles H. Titus, “A Nomenclature in Political Science,” *American Political Science Review* 25 (1931): 45-60.

⁵⁹ Ellen Deborah Ellis, “Political Science at the Crossroads,” *American Political Science Review* 21 (1921): 753.

⁶⁰ Frederick Mundell Watkins, *The State as a Concept of Political Science* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1934), 6.

⁶¹ Watkins, *The State as a Concept of Political Science*, 62.

data, and not the state, needed to be the foundation of political science: “the proper scope of political science is not the study of the state or of any other specific institutional complex, but the investigation of all associations insofar as they can be shown to exemplify the problem of power.”⁶²

Although Watkins was critical of the pluralist attack on the state for taking its claim of juridical sovereignty at face value, his argument that political science needed to focus on the interactions between individuals and groups in associational life anticipated the hold that empirical pluralism would have over American political science during the next two decades.⁶³ It was that way of thinking, which had emerged during the 1920s out of Merriam’s Chicago School and was subsequently developed Harold Lasswell, which was more successful in displacing the state from the lexicon of political scientists.

Characterizing the cutting edge of political science research as being found in observation, survey, and measurement, Merriam’s work led a disciplinary shift from the formal institutional approach that was previously dominant to what they considered to be “actual politics,” in particular individual decision making approached from the perspective of scientific psychology and the behavior of interest groups.⁶⁴ Early political scientists such as Woodrow Wilson had already recognized the empirical pluralism of American life, but saw it as a pathology, in the sense that fragmentation along interest-based or ideological lines both in government and in society was a problem to be solved—not least of all by a more refined understanding of the state

⁶² Watkins, *The State as a Concept of Political Science*, 83.

⁶³ Watkins’ work is notable here not only because it was one of the first works dedicated to the topic of the state to discuss it through the new skeptical perspective, but also because it briefly discussed the Marxist theory of the state. Watkins saw Marxism as defining the state “in terms of [a] specific purpose or function” as an “instrument of economic exploitation” (42).

⁶⁴ Charles E. Merriam, “Recent Advances in Political Methods,” in *Discipline and History*, 137. See also James Farr, “The History of Political Science,” *American Journal of Political Science* 32 (1988): 1175-1195.

as the normative expression of the nation.⁶⁵ In terms of its programmatic outlook on politics, Merriam's position was similar; by using the language of groups and interests as a substitute for classes, he suggested that the goal of politics was not the empowerment of social groups but a strong state that could moderate class conflict.⁶⁶ However, in terms of achieving such a state, he shifted emphasis from studying it in its historical and juridical context to the examination of concrete administrations and institutions; in particular, the ways that states could utilize new forms of popular control for both education and propaganda purposes.⁶⁷

Over the course of approximately three decades (1914-1945), the influence of pragmatist and pluralist thinking changed the trajectory of American political science. Pluralism had essentially been a debate about disciplinary identity. Since the state was the key concept around which the discourse of professional political science had been formed, the pluralist critique challenged the discipline's conceptual bedrock. By grounding liberal democracy in society, and not in the state, pluralism sought to blur the boundaries between political science and its fellow disciplines sociology, psychology, and economics.⁶⁸ Bringing the discipline into closer dialogue with the other social sciences, this intellectual shift pointed toward the creation of shared, cross-disciplinary standards for social inquiry. Consequently, the state concept lost its place as the necessary keystone for a scientific study of politics, replaced by new theoretical approaches that now saw political action through the value-free (yet implicitly liberal) lens of psychological motivation, process-oriented shifts in government policy, and elite and interest-group competition within institutions.⁶⁹ These assumptions in turn became the key methodological and

⁶⁵ Gunnell, "The Declination of the 'State' and the Origins of American Pluralism," 23-24.

⁶⁶ Ross, "Anglo-American Political Science, 1880-1920," 30.

⁶⁷ Farr, "The Historical Science(s) of Politics," 93.

⁶⁸ Gunnell, "The Declination of the 'State' and the Origins of American Pluralism," 29.

⁶⁹ Reflecting this new emphasis on psychology, Lasswell defined the state as a "time-space manifold of subjective events...the recognition that one belongs to a community with a system of paramount claims

theoretical foundations for the behavioral movement of the 1950s and '60s, which represented the nadir of the state concept in political science.

As the prospects for liberal democracy became increasingly bleak during the 1930s and one after another liberal regime in Europe gave way to authoritarianism and eventually war, in America the state became associated with totalitarianism and political myth.⁷⁰ This shift in attitude accelerated the discipline's focus away from the normative pretensions of the state and onto the study of mass politics, of the functioning of concrete government institutions such as the bureaucracy, and the relationship between democracy and propaganda. At this historical juncture, in which the political environment forced the social sciences to undergo a radical and thorough self-reevaluation, it was impossible for the state concept to regain the prominence it once had.

III. The Behavioral Revolution

Dating the height of the behavioralism to the decade spanning 1951-1961, James Farr has characterized it as a methodological plea for science and an underlying political message about liberal pluralism.⁷¹ Recent scholarship has looked back on behavioralism less as a radical break than as a "selective radicalization of existing disciplinary tendencies."⁷² As we saw, inquiry into topics like public opinion, parties, and pressure groups was already present in political science research during the interwar period. However, even if some of the questions raised were a continuation of an earlier disciplinary tradition, behavioralism also attempted to answer them

and expectations." See Harold D. Lasswell, *Psychopathology and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 249.

⁷⁰ For example, see Carl J. Friedrich, "The Deification of the State," *Review of Politics* 1 (1939): 29-30. Asserting that "*the state does not exist*," Friedrich would call it "pseudo-theological claptrap...propagated by gangs that wished to see themselves identified with the community."

⁷¹ Farr, "Remembering the Revolution: Behavioralism in American Political Science," in *Political Science in its History*, 202; Farr, "Political Science," 321. See also Somit and Tanenhaus, *The Development of Political Science*, 173-194; and Seidelman, *Disenchanted Realists*, 149-186

⁷² Dryzek, "Revolutions Without Enemies," p. 490; Adcock, "Interpreting Behavioralism," in *Modern Political Science*, p. 180-208

through then-novel techniques of research, such as survey questionnaires, statistical methods, and psychological experimentation. Perhaps more importantly, the underlying epistemology of the behavioral turn was based on a neo-positivist conception of empirical inquiry, in which only observable phenomena could be treated as factual, where the aim of science was seen as the discovery of law-like generalizations, and where there was a general emphasis on studying politics as what people did, not what they claimed or wrote.⁷³ In the words of David Truman, behavioral research aimed “at stating all the phenomena of government in terms of the observed and observable behavior of men.”⁷⁴

In the postwar context, the pluralist framework involved a number of assumptions that, when taken together, led to a marginalization of the state concept. Whereas the state once referred to a society’s historical evolution as it reached the stage of liberal constitutional government, the postwar consensus surrounding liberal democracy saw the problem as already having been resolved, thereby rendering the state unnecessary. Proponents of behavioralism began with the notion that an underlying procedural consensus on fundamentals across different interests could be assumed.⁷⁵ When it came to the question of institutional reform, behavioralism opposed Marxism by justifying a pluralistic (polyarchic, to use Robert Dahl’s term) institutional arrangement that allowed for the voicing of diverse interests, and incremental changes rather than the revolutionary transformation of the entire system.⁷⁶ Liberal pluralism provided the

⁷³ Farr, “Remembering the Revolution,” 202-203. Adcock notes that behavioralism contained two competing strands of thinking about social science: a “modernist empiricist” strand that rejected excessive abstraction and theorizing at a universal level, and a neo-positivist strand that saw midrange theory building as, at best, secondary to the project of the creation of a more universal theory; see Robert Adcock, “Interpreting Behavioralism,” in *Modern Political Science*, 208. For a critique of behavioral epistemology, see Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Power and Marxist Theory: A Realist View* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

⁷⁴ David Truman, “The Implications of Political Behavior Research” (quoted in Bartelson, *Critique of the State*, 87).

⁷⁵ Dryzek, “Revolutions Without Enemies,” 489.

⁷⁶ Ricci, *The Tragedy of Political Science*, 169-171.

normative foundation for the study of social and political order—an underlying consensus beneath the value-free, empirical, and analytic approach now deemed to be the way toward a truly constructive science of politics. The ideal of value-neutral science logically led to the ideal of a value-neutral, non-coercive political order.⁷⁷

The theory of democratic pluralism that came into prominence during this time involved a shift from the state to society. Unlike the Progressive era, the pluralism of values found in American society was no longer seen as a pathology to be remedied by a public-oriented social science that created a national unity via the state, but as an effective bulwark against totalitarianism. A pluralization of values was thought to lead to a pluralism of (nonideological) interest groups, and in turn, a decentralization of political power. The function of this “new liberal matrix,” consisting of philosophical value relativism, empirical value pluralism, procedural consensus, and dispersed social power, was to relegate the state to the role of a neutral instrument for converting the competing interests found within society into national policy.⁷⁸ Since, in the words of Raymond Seidelman, the behavioralists “believed that the tension between State power and legitimacy had been resolved in large part by existing political arrangements,” the scope of their inquiry could be shifted toward a new science.⁷⁹

At the same time, demoting the concept that had previously been foundational for the discipline required creating a substitute placeholder for the state concept—one that played the same functional role in demarcating political science from the other social sciences. This was the case even though behavioralism promoted an integration of the social sciences as they could be unified by a common epistemology and method. David Truman’s *The Governmental Process*, a study of political interest groups and their connection to formalized institutions of government,

⁷⁷ Ciepley, “Why the State Was Dropped in the First Place,” 170.

⁷⁸ Ciepley, “Why the State Was Dropped in the First Place,” 182, 185.

⁷⁹ Seidelman, *Disenchanted Realists*, 185.

was one of the first major attempts to systematically reconstruct the science of politics without the state as a binding concept. Whereas prewar political science was “preoccupied with the formalities of government,” postwar political science was characterized by the “observation, direct or indirect, of attitudes, of actions, and of responses on the political scene; and conceptual schemes capable of ordering the data from such observations and from the prescriptive formalities of governmental institutions.”⁸⁰ Although Truman reserved the term for describing the earlier guild socialism of figures like G.D.H. Cole, his work conveyed a fundamentally pluralist outlook in describing the role of interest groups in the political process.⁸¹

Reviving Bentley’s research into group politics, Truman explored the dynamic processes through which groups organize and convey their interests into governmental policy. Dismissing the idea of a “whole, universally and invariably held” national interest apart from the interests of those specific groups involved in the process, Truman saw it as nothing more than a politically useful assertion that a group could make against its rivals.⁸² A group interpretation of politics did not “need to account for a totally inclusive interest, because one does not exist.”⁸³ In making this claim, Truman acknowledged that his group interpretation of politics could be critiqued for ignoring the “totally inclusive unity designated by such terms as ‘society’ and ‘the state.’”⁸⁴ However, he countered that the state, as an “inclusive system of relationships,” could be theorized not as a metaphysical unity but simply as the unified process in which interest groups formed and moved from the potential to the organized stage of their activity.⁸⁵ As a result, what was previously referred to as the state or society, by which was meant a cohesive totality, was

⁸⁰ David Truman, *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1981 [1951]), xviii-xix.

⁸¹ Ciepley, “Why the state was Dropped in the First Place,” 209 fn. 23.

⁸² Truman, *The Governmental Process*, 50.

⁸³ Truman, *The Governmental Process*, 51.

⁸⁴ Truman, *The Governmental Process*, 48.

⁸⁵ Truman, *The Governmental Process*, 52.

now conceptualized as group behavior. The coherence and harmony of diverse groups in a pluralistic system was not the result of a pre-existing order coordinated by the state or by government, but of a “natural” coherence produced by the balancing of organized competing interests within a liberal constitutional order.⁸⁶

That such a coherence could be observed—what Truman called “a system that is not accounted for by the ‘sum’ of the organized interest groups in the society”—was explained by the presence of a political culture and democratic attitudes that led participating groups to agree on the rules of the political game.⁸⁷ The appropriation of Parsonian structural functionalism into political science over the course of the decade also provided a new systematic framework for explaining the reproduction of social relations. Looking at society as a system of patterned social roles and commonly held values, this approach emphasized the overlapping consensus on procedures and equilibrium. From this perspective, the state concept that once demarcated political science from the other social sciences became less and less relevant for capturing the dynamics of a self-maintaining social system.⁸⁸ Instead leading scholars in the field like David Easton and Gabriel Almond turned to the notion of a political system as a substitute.

Easton’s *The Political System*, published two years after Truman’s book, can be singled out as one of the most comprehensive attempts during this time to rest political science on a new foundation. His emphasis on a macrosocietal level of analysis and his use of systems theory was only one representative of a diverse set of theoretical frameworks within behavioralism.⁸⁹ Yet Easton’s famous definition of political science as “the study of the authoritative allocation of values for a society,” and his rejection of conventional terms like power and the state, marked a

⁸⁶ Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*, 110.

⁸⁷ Truman, *The Governmental Process*, 51.

⁸⁸ Ciepley, “Why the State was Dropped in the First Place,” 193-194.

⁸⁹ Adcock, “Interpreting Behavioralism,” 190.

concerted effort to develop a new conceptual scheme for describing political phenomena. Adopting the functionalist language of systems theory, Easton redefined the state as a political system in which the preferences of interest groups served as the inputs that led to outputs in the form of government policies. In particular, Easton's project was an explicit attempt to revive the place of systematic theoretical research in political science—albeit in a form of empirical theory that was markedly different from the normative theory of canonical political philosophy.

In a chapter discussing the orientation of political research, Easton laid out three reasons for why the state was inadequate and needed to be supplanted by the concept of a political system. “It describes the properties not of all political phenomena but of only certain kinds, excluding, for example, the study of pre-state societies; it stands overshadowed as a tool of analysis by its social utility as a myth; and it constitutes at best a poor formal definition.”⁹⁰

First, in a critique of contemporary normative pluralists such as R.M MacIver, Easton argued that the state was a limited concept that was insufficient for capturing all the relevant phenomena of political life. The territorial state, which linked a stable government to a settled population, and which served as the point of reference for pluralists, was a uniquely modern and fairly recent political form. By virtue of this definition, other polities such as the Greek city-state and the feudality of the Middle Ages would either have to be ahistorically subsumed under this common term, or be seen as underdeveloped proto-states, in what would amount to a Whig reading of history. Instead, drawing upon the functionalist insights of contemporary sociology and anthropology, Easton suggested that other political activities falling outside of the conceptual boundaries of the state—kinship ties, religious conflict, charismatic leadership, and so forth—were better captured by the broader notion of a political system. “At most, the state in

⁹⁰ David Easton, *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971 [1953]), 108-109.

a pluralist sense is a particular institutional form that political life takes at some historical moments...It describes one institutional or structural variant of a political system.”⁹¹

Second, the state was an ideologically-laden concept with its roots in the Westphalian myth of national unity and sovereignty. The myth of the state that culminated the nineteenth century was perpetuated because of its political utility, in terms of creating a feeling of national unity among populations and of pushing back against the authority of the church. Its “vagueness and imprecision” allowed it to serve this ideological function, but was also what made it inadequate as a scientific concept. In that regard, the state’s importance laid “largely in the field of practical politics as an instrument to achieve national cohesion rather than in the area of thoughtful analysis.”⁹²

Third, the formal definition of the state best served as a description of one particular type of political institution which, as history had shown, was not exhaustive. Delimiting political science as the study of the state prevented the discovery of general properties of political phenomena not be captured by the term. “Since new social conditions call forth new kinds of structures and practices for the expression of this activity, the precise mechanism, whether it be an organizational pattern called a state or some other kind, is always a matter for empirical investigation.”⁹³ By casting as broad of a net as possible with the concept of a political system, one would not preemptively rule out other relevant political interactions that could be taking place.

For all its theoretical boldness, Easton’s project could not overcome the latent statism that ran like a common thread from the past generations of scholarship into the behavioral movement. Replacing the state with the functionalist idea of a complex system of harmoniously interacting

⁹¹ Easton, *The Political System*, 142.

⁹² Easton, *The Political System*, 112.

⁹³ Easton, *The Political System*, 115.

groups once again raised the question that the normative pluralists of the 1920s could not resolve: What would serve as the system's *a priori* guarantee of unity and coherence? Easton suggested that social stability and integration was based on political life conceived of as an authoritative allocation of values; but this simply sidestepped the question of the normative basis, justification, and enforcement of this authority. If the coherence among the observable facts of political life were evidence of the existence of a political system, then at the same time, it was necessary to assume the existence of such a system to discern the coherence in the first place.⁹⁴ In Easton's framework, the political system displaced the state while serving as its semantic equivalent in discourse.⁹⁵

Furthermore, in remarking that the state was more important for practical politics than thoughtful analysis, Easton inadvertently hit upon a key issue alluded to in the beginning: the simultaneous presence and absence of the state as an object for analysis. How was it possible that the growth of the administrative state accompanying the rise of the United States as a superpower by the middle of the twentieth century happened side by side with a concerted scholarly effort to show its irrelevance for systematic political analysis? As I will argue in the following chapters, this ambiguity would create a substantial blind spot to the state. If the actual practice of politics could not be explained without referring to the state, then at the same time, the inability to provide an adequate definition of it as a theoretical object constantly frustrated efforts at understanding this political practice. The result was that the dual character of the modern state as an ideological but nevertheless real (not fictional) entity was not sufficiently integrated into conceptions of politics.

⁹⁴ Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*, 110-111.

⁹⁵ Critics of pluralism like Henry Kariel accused it of defining "a state without a government...composed of a plurality of voluntary associations so guided by an unseen providence that their interaction constitutes the public good." See Kariel, *The Decline of American Pluralism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 2.

This tension could be seen in other functionalist attempts to replace the state with the political system. For example, Gabriel Almond described the concept of a system as a “*totality* of relevant units, an interdependence between the interactions of units, and a certain stability in the interaction of these units (perhaps best described as a changing equilibrium.)”⁹⁶ The political system, in turn, could be seen as a sub-variant of this broader sociological concept, defined by “the patterned interaction of roles affecting decisions backed up by the threat of physical compulsion.”⁹⁷ Although Almond was clear that physical compulsion was not the only characteristic of government, it was the only one that was unique to it, in the form of legitimate coercion in a given territory. This definition, as a functionalist gloss on Weber, however, did not entirely displace the state concept. As Almond wrote, “The employment of *ultimate, comprehensive, and legitimate* physical coercion is the monopoly of states, and the political system is uniquely concerned with the scope, the direction, and the conditions affecting the employment of this physical coercion.”⁹⁸ In this formulation, the terms state and political system coexisted. Since the state was now identified with the administrative institutions of government, it could be subsumed under the broader notion of a political system, which captured non-institutional phenomena like legitimacy and political culture—and which, in turn, was a part of a broader notion of a social system.

Although behavioralism never became hegemonic in the discipline, its influence was substantial enough to define the prevailing mood surrounding professional political science and its role in relation to liberal governance. By 1961, its relative success would lead Dahl to suggest that the behavioral mood, as a movement of protest, would gradually disappear—not due to its

⁹⁶ Gabriel Almond, “Comparative Political Systems,” *The Journal of Politics* 18 (1956): 393.

⁹⁷ Almond, “Comparative Political Systems,” 395.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

failure, but rather to its unquestioned incorporation into the mainstream of political science.⁹⁹ Yet over the rest of the decade it also became increasingly clear that in its enthusiasm for placing the study of politics on more scientific ground, this new orientation had lost the element of public relevance that had characterized political science up through World War II. In the words of Seidelman, “Behavioral scientists of the 1950s and 1960s might have been the first generation of social scientists to consider democratic publics and American institutions as mere objects of inquiry rather than as subjects of political change.”¹⁰⁰

Growing disenchantment with the scientific bent of behavioralism, as well as the political and cultural uprisings of the late 1960s, made it apparent that behavioralism and pluralism could no longer serve as adequate descriptions of American liberal democracy. The rise of “post-behavioralism” during the late 1960s has been discussed in a number of disciplinary histories that have situated this scholarly turn in a social, cultural, and political context.¹⁰¹ The conflicts of the 1960s over the institutions and cultural values of American liberal democracy brought to the forefront the repressed aspects of the postwar consensus, manifesting themselves in renewed struggles over questions of race, gender, and class. In addition, the conceptual identification of “state” and “government” brought with it unhistorical and placating value judgments about Cold War liberal democracy that were soon shown to be premature. Not only did it become apparent that American liberal democracy had achieved its stability by virtue of excluding a host of marginalized actors from the political arena, but also that the workings of American government did not truly resemble the series of inputs and outputs imagined by

⁹⁹ Robert Dahl, “The Behavioral Approach in Political Science: Epitaph for a Monument to a Successful Protest,” *American Political Science Review* 55 (1961): 763-772.

¹⁰⁰ Raymond Seidelman, “Political Scientists, Disenchanted Realists, and Disappearing Democrats,” in *Discipline and History*, 318.

¹⁰¹ For example, Seidelman, *Disenchanted Realists*; David M. Ricci, *The Tragedy of Political Science: Politics, Scholarship, and Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Farr, Dryzek, and Leonard, eds. *Political Science in its History*.

pluralist scholars, and more an institutional and bureaucratic structure only occasionally responsive to voters.

This breakdown of the postwar liberal consensus spurred a self-reflexive movement within the discipline that criticized behavioralism for its conservatism in empiricist disguise, its supposedly value free analysis, its shunning of intellectual responsibility in the face of a domestic legitimation crisis, and its privileging of technical research over engagement with substantive questions. No less a proponent of behavioralism than Easton recognized the powerful thrust of this critique, suggesting in his 1969 APSA Presidential Address that the failure of pluralist interpretations of democracy was due to “a continuing hesitation to question our normative premises and to examine the extent to which these premises determine the selection of problems and their ultimate interpretations.”¹⁰² Calling post-behavioralism a “pervasive intellectual tendency” that was impossible to ignore, Easton thus argued for a greater acceptance of its critique, as an “opportunity for necessary change.”¹⁰³

IV. The Reemergence of the State

The disciplinary opening created by social forces operating outside the academy, as well as the internal critique of behavioralism that led to the formation of the Caucus for a New Political Science in 1967, gave rise to a renewed concern with the state and for questions surrounding the relationship of politics to society. The revival of interest in the classical social theory of Marx, Tocqueville, and Weber among the new generation of political scientists during this time spoke to the need for a reengagement with “big” questions that had seemingly disappeared off the research agendas of behavioralist and pluralist scholars during the prior

¹⁰² David Easton, “The New Revolution in Political Science,” *American Political Science Review* 63 (1969)

¹⁰³ Easton, “The New Revolution in Political Science,” 1061.

decades. Therefore, the return to the state that took place during the 1970s and 1980s must be seen as a response to the inadequacy of behavioralism for diagnosing the underlying problems of American society.

Even though we saw above that the state has always been constitutive of American political science—even in its rejection—the explicit return to the state gave the discipline a much needed infusion of a new set of theories and questions. This return the state distinguished itself from the normative and juridical statism of the initial founding period of political science. It was developed as an area of inquiry in contrast to the two dominant paradigms within political science and political sociology: structural functionalism/systems theory, and pluralism. Whereas “systems theory/behaviorism conformed to and supported the pluralist fiction of a fragmented society with more or less equal shares of political power among its factions,” reviving the state meant looking more closely at relations of power, coercion, and domination that were beyond the scope of the pluralist arrangement.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps the defining feature of the neo-statist response to behavioralism was its rejection of the idea that political outcomes were the result of mass preferences originating in society. As Almond observed in his critical overview of this scholarship, neo-statism was a response to three distinct paradigms in political science: pluralism, structural functionalism, and Marxism. Despite their differences, all were presented as sharing a societally reductive perspective that ultimately treated the state as a dependent variable—an outcome of some more basic process, such as the interplay of interest groups (pluralism, structural functionalism) or social classes (Marxism).¹⁰⁵ In contrast, the neo-statists affirmed the autonomy of the state, often defined as political leadership within state institutions distinct from public preferences, as an independent variable

¹⁰⁴ Aronowitz and Bratsis, “State Power, Global Power,” in *Paradigm Lost*, p. xiii.

¹⁰⁵ Almond, “The Return to the State.”

for explaining state-society relations. As one commentator put it, the state as a concept “encompasses the government, yet is broader and more abstract...[it] is necessary to get at the mediating role of the state in structuring the formation and organization of societal pressures and in providing collective direction for public policy.”¹⁰⁶ The neo-statist approach thus wished to preserve the analytic distinction between state and society that behavioralism and structural functionalism, in different ways, both threatened to blur when they treated government policy as an equilibrium of preference inputs and policy outputs.

This “discovery” of state autonomy was not entirely unprecedented in the history of political science. As far back as 1900, Goodnow distinguished politics and administration as the two key component parts of the American state, writing that “politics has to do with policies or expressions of state will. Administration has to do with the execution of these policies.”¹⁰⁷ Consequently, the functions of administration required a neutral bureaucracy—an organized “force of governmental agents absolutely free from the influence of politics.”¹⁰⁸ The gradual decline of the state concept over the following decades until its eclipse during the behavioral era had less to do with there being no need for a depoliticized and semi-autonomous bureaucracy, and more to do with a focus on the democratic consensus that would render liberal institutions stable. American pluralism in the postwar period saw the idea of state autonomy as a pathology more characteristic of dictatorships than of liberal democracies.¹⁰⁹ The neo-statist critique of pluralism articulated by Theda Skocpol in *Bringing the State Back In* took aim at this reduction of government to “an arena within which economic interest groups or normative social

¹⁰⁶ Bert A. Rockman, “Minding the State—Or a State of Mind? Issues in the Comparative Conceptualization of the State” in *The Elusive State: International and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. James A. Caporaso (Sage Publications, 1989), 176.

¹⁰⁷ Frank Goodnow, *Politics and Administration: A Study in Government* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1900), 18.

¹⁰⁸ Goodnow, *Politics and Administration*, 85.

¹⁰⁹ Ciepley, “Why the State was Dropped in the First Place,” 192, 198.

movements contended or allied with one another to shape the making of public policy decisions.”¹¹⁰ Yet to understand these dynamics, she argued, one needed to pay closer attention both to the individual initiatives taken by leaders within government institutions, as well as to how government agencies did not simply process social demands but participated in the formulation of policy decisions.¹¹¹

Defenders of pluralism like Almond took issue with the supposed novelty of the neo-statist approach. They challenged the premise that system theory and structural-functionalism were societally reductive, and contended that neo-statism hastily overlooked how scholars working in the pluralist tradition had already contributed to the study of government as an administrative body independent of society. Works by Pendleton Herring, E.E. Schattschneider, V.O. Key, Jr., and Robert Dahl, among others, were brought in by Almond as examples of how autonomous government institutions figured in important ways into their studies; and how the pluralist “paradigm” was actually a two-directional one in which society and the state influenced each other. In fact, Almond wrote, it was the statist that had “fallen into the trap of neglecting nonstatal variables, such as political parties, interest groups, the media of communication, and the like.”¹¹²

Other critics suggested that not only did the pluralist literature of the 1950s-60s offer state centered explanations focusing on the properties, preferences, biases, norms, and roles of government actors—but also that neo-statism was making an even bigger mistake of conflating two different phenomena: the autonomy of public officials and institutions, and their internal coherence. As Richard Ellis argued, “scholarly skepticism about the utility of the concept of the

¹¹⁰ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Current Research” in *Bringing the State Back In*, eds. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985: 4.

¹¹¹ Ira Katznelson, “The State to the Rescue?: Political Science and History Reconnect” *Social Research* 59 (1992): 733.

¹¹² Almond, “The Return to the State,” 872.

state stemmed primarily from a belief that such a term implied a degree of *coherence* among public officials and institutions that was highly misleading”—not that those who were in state institutions were autonomous from social actors. The methodologically individualist framework through which pluralists approached their subject matter was a virtue, since it prevented the reification of entities such as “the state” that had its own preferences and interests. “Pluralist hesitancy to speak of ‘the state’ can be better explained by their methodological predisposition to reduce political phenomena to the aggregate consequences of individual behavior and their empirical discovery that power in the American political system is fragmented and dispersed.”¹¹³

Rebuttals such as these played a role in the gradual drift from explicit discussions of “state autonomy” to the more nuanced language of “new institutionalism” during the 1990s. Today, scholarship dealing with the state continues to affirm that the state can only be understood by disaggregating it into its constitutive parts such as institutions and political actors, thereby allowing for more careful observation and measurement.¹¹⁴ However, Almond’s attempt to use empirical pluralism to explain away the importance of the neo-statist turn in political science was misguided. As Barkey and Parikh pointed out, the studies invoked as counterexamples of government autonomy in a pluralist framework either tended to focus on government as a collection of individuals performing specific functions, or attempted to understand the state by studying its specific institutions. Missing from this picture was a perspective on the state an administrative apparatus that could extract resources, control and coerce the population, and maintain a political, legal, and normative order.¹¹⁵ The neo-statist

¹¹³ Richard J. Ellis, “Pluralist Political Science & ‘The State’: Distinguishing Between Autonomy & Coherence,” *Polity* 24 (1992): 517, 572.

¹¹⁴ For example, Margaret Levi, “The State of the Study of the State,” in *Political Science: State of the Discipline*: 33-55.

¹¹⁵ Barkey and Parikh, “Comparative Perspectives on The State,” 524.

literature was attempting to highlight precisely these authoritative qualities of modern states, in contrast to the relatively harmonious and consensus-based perspective of the pluralists.

As I will show in greater detail in Chapters Three and Four, prominent scholars associated with this movement such as Theda Skocpol, Guillermo O'Donnell, and Ira Katznelson not only found inspiration in the writings of Weber and Marx, but developed their research via a direct engagement with contemporary neo-Marxist perspectives like structural Marxism, dependency theory, and world-systems analysis. However, they channeled the questions surrounding class, social power, and legitimacy and authority first articulated by these thinkers toward the systematic, empirical study of contemporary phenomena like democratization, revolution, and social movements. Skocpol cautioned that instead of a new grand theory of "The State" what was needed were "solidly grounded and analytically sharp understandings of the causal regularities that underlie the histories of states, social structures, and transnational relations in the modern world."¹¹⁶ Yet while neo-statism inherited from Marxism its sensitivity to long-term historical development and to extra-institutional forms of domination, it was equally critical of that position for its alleged societal reductionism and inability to delineate the boundaries of political autonomy. As Stephen Krasner wrote in his overview of the neo-statist turn, only structural Marxists could claim to be developing a coherent theory of the state, and even they were "plagued by deep and probably insoluble difficulties related to the degree of autonomy that can be accorded to the state."¹¹⁷ Neo-statism rejected what it took to be the overly abstract and taxonomic approach of neo-Marxism in favor of mid-range theory building, in which empirical research on various types of states would correspondingly modify state theory as a whole. Therefore, while it broke with Marxism to a lesser degree than it did with behavioralism and

¹¹⁶ Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In: Current Research," 28.

¹¹⁷ Stephen Krasner, "Approaches to the State: Alternative Conceptions and Historical Dynamics," *Comparative Politics* 16 (1984): 225.

structural-functional theory, it largely retained the positivistic inclinations of American social science, as it was characterized by the use of analytic classification, the rejection of explicitly normative standpoints, and an inductive research program centered on generating and testing empirical, “mid-range theory.”¹¹⁸

The state has been a constant presence within the history of American political science. It provided early political science with a referent for establishing its disciplinary identity, insofar as the state functioned as the boundary of the political and a source of conceptual coherence. Yet this early legacy also meant that the subsequent transformation of political science would be bound to the concept, where even a refutation of its existence required a degree of engagement with the state and the political phenomena it was thought to represent.¹¹⁹ In other words, this inability of political science to fully drop the state during the twentieth century shows that it has been constitutive of the discipline; and the regeneration of the discipline during the late 1960s, at a time when its predominant theories became insufficient for explaining empirical reality, required the importation of what was then a novel discourse about the state. In the following chapter, I will discuss the neo-Marxist critiques of liberal pluralism and their attempt to develop an analysis of the capitalist state, focusing in particular on the influential contributions of Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas. I will argue that their writings, as well as their running debate during the course of the 1970s played a crucial role in making the state a focal point of postbehavioral political science once they were received into the American context.

¹¹⁸ Adcock, Bevir, and Stimson, “Historicizing the New Institutionalism(s),” 265.

¹¹⁹ Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*, 64-65.

Chapter Two: Marxist State Theory as Critique of Political Science

“No one who does not come to grips with the ideas of marxism can be an adequate social scientist; no one who believes that marxism contains the last word can be one either.” –
C. Wright Mills, *The Marxists*, 1962

“I am not absolutely sure myself that I am right to be Marxist; one is never sure.” –
Nicos Poulantzas, Interview with *Marxism Today*, 1979

“How odd all the furious arguments, the drawing up of battle lines, now seems.” –
Frances Fox Piven, “Reflections on Ralph Miliband,” 1994

I. Pluralism and its Critics

The emergence of radical political theory in Europe and the United States was spurred not only by mass discontent with the conservative tone of postwar discourse but also by the perception that the social and economic consensus forged in the previous decade had reached an impasse. In general, within the context of the late 1960s-early 1970s, a revival of interest in Marxism was indicative of a broader dissatisfaction with the present conditions of social scientific analysis. The escalation of the American war effort in Vietnam over the course of the 1960s coincided with years of increasing racial tensions caused by the Civil Rights movement in the south, nationwide unrest on campuses, and riots in inner cities. Meanwhile, in Europe the Paris student and workers’ uprisings of May 1968 and the Soviet repression of the Prague Spring in August of that same year confirmed the skepticism of the USSR’s critics, who remained unconvinced by the promise of a thaw after Khrushchev’s Secret Speech at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in 1956.

As President of the APSA, David Easton observed in his 1969 address that pluralist interpretations of democracy had failed to anticipate and understand domestic crises, including the unequal distribution of power, and developments abroad, with Cold War liberalism having

become apologetic of American foreign policy.¹ This intellectual and cultural shift was not unique to political science in the United States, as it also characterized political science in France and West Germany.² But the past exclusion of Marxism, as well as the preeminent position of American political science in the postwar context, makes this a noteworthy change. As discussed in the previous chapter, modernization and the promulgation of values conducive to this process were also the concerns of functionalists and pluralists; yet unlike those discourses common to political science and sociology, the language of the state reintroduced through the filter of Marxist concepts emphasized class conflict and the possibility of social rupture instead of the formulation of liberal consensus from out of a pluralistic universe of interests. In short, this discourse provided a revitalized critical theoretical language for studying questions about the political and economic development of both industrialized and developing states.

Perhaps no academic figure best anticipated these times in his work and thought than C. Wright Mills. Although he died in 1962 and so did not live to see the rise of the New Left to which he is often considered an intellectual godfather, Mills' books like *The New Men of Power* (1948) and *White Collar* (1951) critiqued the regularization of life within the bounds of the capitalist system, while *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) made the case for a form of public-oriented and problem-driven social science. However, it was Mills' 1956 book *The Power Elite* that arguably had the most impact and relevance for the discipline of political science, since Mills equally distanced himself from both liberal-pluralist and Marxist understandings of political power. Over the next twenty years, debates about state power within political science between pluralists, neo-Weberians and neo-Marxists were all directly or indirectly engaging with Mills' formulation of the power elite.

¹ Easton, "The New Revolution in Political Science."

² See David Easton, John G. Gunnell, and Luigi Graziano, eds. *The Development of Political Science: A Comparative Survey* (London: Routledge, 1991).

Mills' most important contribution to political science and political sociology was his development of a Weberian analysis of power in the context of the mid-twentieth century United States, and the growing link between corporate, bureaucratic, and military institutions in the consolidation of a powerful American state. Mills' goal of examining the linkage between economic, political, and military interests as the driving forces behind U.S. policymaking advanced one of the most powerful critiques of the pluralist model at the time, and anticipated the central question of the autonomy of politics from the economy that would spur a younger generation of social scientists to grapple with the Marxist framework. In that regard, the positive reception of *The Power Elite* in American Marxist circles and Mills' own interpretation of Marxist political theory in his book *The Marxists* (1962) means that he served as an intellectual bridge between the mainstream social science of the 1950s and the more critical strands of scholarship that emerged by the mid-1960s.³

Echoing the critique of contemporary social science made in *The Sociological Imagination*, Mills suggested that the current age of the "end of ideology" had, to its own detriment, led to an intellectually impoverished conception of the modern world. Whereas classical social theory—of which Marx was a representative figure—effectively combined empirical evidence with a historical vision and a normative critique of the status quo, the pressures to conform to contemporary liberal ideology, which had become increasingly conservative in its political outlook, led to a provincial and limited form of theorizing in the name of modern "social science." As Mills wrote,

"The 'Social Science' in the name of which marxism is ignored or rejected is more often than not a social science having little or no concern with the pivotal events and the historic acceleration characteristic of our immediate times. It is a social science of the narrow focus, the trivial detail, the abstracted almighty unimportant fact...The values of

³ See Richard Flacks, "Marxism and Sociology," in *The Left Academy: Marxist Scholarship on American Campuses*, eds. Bertell Ollman and Edward Vernoff (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982): 9-52.

the social scientists generally lead them to accept their society pretty much as it is; the values of Marx lead him to condemn his society—root, stock and branch.”⁴

Yet at that time, Mills continued, there was no “marxist social science’ of any intellectual consequence.”⁵ Until then, political science in the United States was largely sealed off from, and had been developed in attempts to refute, Marxist ideas.

The Marxists contained a Cold War-era tone that at parts seems dated today. Yet it also remains of interest since it contains a discussion of Marx’s theory of the state. Mills’ pithy summary of the Marxist position on the nature of political power was that “In all class societies, the state is the coercive instrument of the owning classes,” who must increasingly rely on political coercion to perpetuate its rule.⁶ Yet Mills observed that this was only partly true, and that the full variety of capitalist societies contained many other examples of the functions and interests served by the state. Although Marx had correctly theorized the relationship between the power of property and political domination, his relative neglect of political and military institutions led him to posit a unidirectional relationship between the productive base and the residual category of the superstructure. Rather than being determined by the economy, Mills saw these institutions as “autonomous and originaive;” nor were these the only examples—other collective bodies, such as labor unions, also acted through the state as a countervailing force against the political domination of an economically-dominant class. Perhaps even more troubling for Mills was the fact that the collectivization of property in the Soviet state did not create new democratic mechanisms but had actually increased exploitation.⁷

In contrast to scholars like Easton, Mills’ objection to Marx’s view of the state was *not* concerned with its overall adequacy as a tool for social inquiry. Mills was not questioning the

⁴ C. Wright Mills, *The Marxists* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1962), 10-11.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Mills, *The Marxists*, 89.

⁷ Mills, *The Marxists*, 118.

existence of the state, but rather the reductive picture given by some in the Marxist camp. The definition of the state as a “committee of the ruling class” or “of propertied classes” foreclosed “the range of relations between economic classes and political forms,” leaving us incapable of understanding in a comparative and historical context the relationship between different political systems and their capitalist economic bases.⁸ What we needed to do was “make the state an object of inquiry, rather than a theory closed up in a slogan.”⁹ Establishing whether economic, political, or military determinism took precedence in a given context was a hypothesis to be tested, not a first principle to be assumed for all capitalist societies, let alone all societies across history.¹⁰

Yet in contrast to Marxist accounts, Mills drew a Weberian distinction between the terms class and rule; whereas the former was an economic term, the latter was a political one. The compound phrase ‘ruling class’ preferred by Marxists, therefore, did not allow enough autonomy to the political and military agents, who could carry out all the important decisions “only in the often intricate ways of coalition,” and not as a single class whose unified interests were to be presumed.¹¹ In contrast to the theory of the ruling class, Mills advanced his own notion of “the power elite,” which he saw as a term that implied a structural understanding of power, yet was more conducive to empirical observation:

“This is *not* a matter of something called ‘elite theory’ (whatever that might be) versus ‘class theory.’ Both are *structural* conceptions, defined by reference to the institutional positions men occupy, and, accordingly, to the means of power that are available to them. It is the shape, the variety, the relations, the weight of such institutions and such positions

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Mills, *The Marxists*, 119.

¹⁰ Mills, *The Marxists*, 126.

¹¹ Mills, *The Power Elite*, 277. Subsequently, Mills would come under criticism from Marxists such as Poulantzas, who suggested that this distinction between essentially economic and political concepts was itself an unreflexive bourgeois assumption. See Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, trans. Timothy O’hagan (London: Verso, 1973), 103-104; and Clyde W. Barrow, “Plain Marxists, Sophisticated Marxists, and C. Wright Mills’ ‘The Power Elite,’” *Science & Society* 71 (2007): 400-430.

within them that is at question. And these are not questions that can be solved by definition.”¹²

More broadly, Mills was an early critic of the metaphor of base and superstructure that was the source of economically reductionist arguments about historical change within the Marxist tradition. As he wrote,

“It is doubtful that either base or superstructure can be used (as Marx does) as units, for both are composed of a mixture of many elements and forces...The institutional organization of a society, including relations of production, certainly penetrates deeply into technological implements and their scientific developments, including forces of production, shaping their meaning and their role in historical change...The problem of mediation—exactly *how* the base determines the superstructure—is not worked out well.”¹³

Mills’ contemporaries like Paul Sweezy, Herbert Aptheker, and Thomas Bottomore pointed out various aspects of *The Power Elite* that could have been supplemented with a careful and systematic application of Marxist concepts, which indeed could have provided evidence for the existence of an American ruling class.¹⁴ For example, one critique developed after Mills had already been superseded by the neo-Marxist revival maintained that his adherence to ruling elite theory had posed an all-powerful elite against an apathetic mass, thereby preventing a theory of social and political change based on the insights about class conflict provided by the Marxist framework.¹⁵ In retrospect, Mills came to be treated as a precursor to the instrumentalist school of state theory, alongside figures such as G. William Domhoff. However, even if Mills’ account was not theoretically rigorous enough to persuade the “sophisticated Marxists,” *The Power Elite* undoubtedly had an important impact on the next generation of social and political scholarship in

¹² Mills, *The Marxists*, 118.

¹³ Mills, *The Marxists*, 106. Coincidentally, Althusser was making a similar critique of economism in France, as a number of the key essays that went into *For Marx* (1965) were first published in 1962-63, almost concurrently with Mills. However, Althusser’s work almost perfectly fell into the category of “sophisticated Marxism” of which Mills was highly skeptical. See Mills, *The Marxists*, 96-98.

¹⁴ Barrow, “Plain Marxists, Sophisticated Marxists, and C. Wright Mills’ ‘The Power Elite,’” 407-417.

¹⁵ Isaac Balbus, “Ruling Elite Theory vs. Marxist Class Analysis,” *Monthly Review* (May 1971): 36-46.

the U.S., contributing to the reorientation away from pluralist accounts and creating an opening within which more radical currents of thought could get traction.

Prompted by critiques such as Mills', toward the end of the 1960s dissidents within the social sciences became increasingly vocal about the need to rethink their purpose and public mission. As one observer put it, "Marxist political studies was born from a collision between realities in the United States and elsewhere—imperialism, inequality, repression, racism, and sexism—and the myths of pluralism, democracy, and incrementalism purveyed in American government textbooks and scholarly research by the major figures in American political science."¹⁶ Founded in 1967, the Caucus for a New Political Science challenged the APSA's commitment to a value-neutral social science and the theoretical dominance of pluralism. As a collected volume of Caucus essays from 1970 asserted, "as American society is increasingly being torn apart by racial strife, by imperialist adventures abroad, by a crisis of authority in its major institutions, by repressive tactics of the state, by poverty and pollution, it is increasingly important for the critique of pluralism to be extended and expanded."¹⁷

In retrospect, the Caucus has been criticized for having become complacent with transforming the discipline rather than helping foster the radical social change that had seemed possible in the late 1960s.¹⁸ But after the campus uprisings and the New Left had died down into a mood of sober reflection on the structural limitations of political voluntarism, this also provided the impetus for more radical scholarship that sought to explore the biases present in political science and the distortions introduced into it by what Bertell Ollman at the time called the pluralist "standard assumption of the legitimacy and longevity of the present political

¹⁶ Mark Kesselman, "The State and Class Struggle: Trends in Marxist Political Science," in *The Left Academy*, 87.

¹⁷ Marvin Surkin and Alan Wolfe, "Introduction: An End to Political Science," in Surkin and Wolfe, *An End to Political Science: The Caucus Papers* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 6.

¹⁸ See Seidelman, *Disenchanted Realists*; Barrow, "The Intellectual Origins of New Political Science."

system”¹⁹ While the Caucus largely failed in its ambitious goal of democratizing the internal politics of the APSA, its critique of mainstream political science left a mark on the discipline, as over the course of the 1970s Marxist ideas proliferated on university campuses, to the extent that, for example, four Marxist-inspired textbooks of American government were published between 1970-1981.²⁰

One way this effect was felt was in the establishment of such journals as *Politics and Society* (1970), *Kapitalistate* (1973), and slightly later, *New Political Science* (1979), all of which became outlets for self-consciously heterodox and radical scholarship in political science.²¹ Invoking Mills’ critique of “methodological pretensions” and “obscurantist conceptions,” the Editorial Introduction to the first volume of *Politics and Society* objected to the “depoliticization of the study of politics, to the paucity of critical analysis, to the unnecessary use of a parochial and often pseudo-scientific jargon.”²² An edited collection of articles published during its’ first two years of existence presented the journal as the outcome of both the dissatisfaction with the “limited, reformist politics of the Caucus” and the waning of the “visible opposition ferment in American society.”²³ The Caucus had focused too heavily on developing critiques of pluralism and asserting the independence of a group of political scientists rather than the more important intellectual task of developing alternative critical modes of interdisciplinary social analysis informed by approaches such as Marxism, structuralism, and phenomenology.

¹⁹ Bertell Ollman, “Marxism and Political Science: Prolegomenon to a Debate on Marx’s ‘Method’” *Politics & Society* 3 (1973): 491.

²⁰ Kesselman, “The State and Class Struggle: Trends in Marxist Political Science,” 88.

²¹ Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 184-185.

²² Ira Katznelson, “Editorial Introduction,” *Politics & Society* 1 (1970): 2.

²³ Ira Katznelson, Gordon Adams, Philip Brenner and Alan Wolfe, “Introduction” in *The Politics & Society Reader* (Philadelphia: David McKay Company, 1974), 1-4.

This goal was expanded even more specifically by the journal *Kapitalistate*. Developed in part as a response to corporate-liberal theories of power influenced by Mills and expanded by Domhoff during the 1960s, *Kapitalistate* “aimed at furthering an analysis of Marxist theories of the state,” and introduced a new readership to West German Marxist state theories such as the systems analytic approach of Claus Offe and the derivationist or “capital logic” school of Joachim Hirsch and Elmar Altvater. Until its dissolution in 1983, the journal was influential in shifting the debate away from the conflict between pluralism and elite theory and became an important outlet for bringing international Marxist debates to a North American audience²⁴

Perhaps more than any other scholars, the contributions of Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas defined the initial agenda and boundaries of research on the state in the social sciences in North America and Western Europe during this time. Although neither Miliband nor Poulantzas had been living in the United States at that point, the English-language publication of their works during the early 1970s and their debate about the capitalist state in the pages of the *New Left Review* introduced them to a wider audience of radical scholars that was then seeking theoretical alternatives from which to analyze and critique postwar capitalism. I will argue that their contributions played a key role in the shift from the debates between pluralists and corporate-liberal or elite theories inspired by Mills toward neo-Marxism in the context of the American social sciences. In addition, it is often overlooked that both scholars were participating in a dialogue not just with other Marxists, but also with a broader array of Anglo-American literature in political science and sociology. After discussing their individual contributions and key points of contention, I will suggest that insofar as their debate came to represent a hyper-stylized conflict between “instrumentalist” and “structuralist” conceptions of the state, it served

²⁴ See G. William Domhoff, “Corporate-Liberal Theory and the Social Security Act: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge,” *Politics & Society* 15 (1987): 297-330.

as the key framework through which this critical scholarship on the state was transmitted and received within American political science.

II. Marxism and the State

Despite the contributions of thinkers like Lenin and Gramsci in the first half of the twentieth century, subsequent Marxist discussions of the state had largely taken a backseat to analyses of economic development and class conflict. By the 1950s, where the state was explicitly addressed in Marxist accounts, it was largely via the theory of state monopoly capitalism, which treated state institutions and power as almost wholly derivative of the relations of production, and as characterized by the “fusion between the state and monopoly capital to form a single mechanism of economic exploitation and political domination.”²⁵ This theory was unsatisfactory due to its reductionism, since it derived state power directly from the productive “base,” and presented an “instrumentalist” position by suggesting that the state was a tool in the hands of the ruling class, acting on its behalf and at its behest.²⁶ Therefore, there was little discussion of the extent and contexts where the state was autonomous from the class struggle, and what role it played in the legitimation of the ruling class and the ideological systems by which that rule was validated. This was doubly peculiar since the absence or failure of communist revolutions and the experience of fascism in Western Europe had made “superstructural” issues concerning ideology, hegemony, and political power all the more pressing.²⁷

²⁵ Bob Jessop, *The Capitalist State: Marxist Theories and Methods*. (Oxford: Martin Robertson and Company, 1982), 60.

²⁶ For a concise summary of the instrumentalist position, see Raju J. Das, “State Theories: A Critical Analysis,” *Science & Society* 60 (1996): 27-57.

²⁷ See Boris Frankel, “On the State of the State: Marxist Theories of the State after Leninism,” *Theory and Society* 7 (1979): 199-242.

Whereas in past decades, the Marxist-Leninist conception of the state had predominated both within the Soviet Union and among the official positions of communist parties in the West, the intellectual opening created after 1956 allowed for a gradual reemergence of dialogue about aspects of Marxist theory that had previously been off limits. However, it was not until the late 1960s that this change was fully noted with the near simultaneous publication of Nicos Poulantzas' *Pouvoir politique et classes sociales* in 1968 (translated as *Political Power and Social Classes* in 1973), and Ralph Miliband's *The State in Capitalist Society* in 1969. The books represented two of the most in depth and influential attempts to provide a Marxist analysis of the state in Western liberal democracies. Not since Gramsci had any Marxist authors attempted so thoroughly to trace the phenomenon of the capitalist state as an independent actor within the larger social body, and to articulate the relationship between the state and the other spheres of society.

Both authors, and the broader Marxist state debate that their works helped spawn during the 1970s, notably reconsidered the unidirectional relationship between base and superstructure. Although approaching the problem from highly different theoretical lenses, both authors were seeking to move Marxist theory away from the class reductive "economism" that characterized Soviet Marxism and the state monopoly capitalist interpretations dominant in the West. This tendency of economism, the origins of which Poulantzas traced back to the Second International, maintained that "other levels of social reality, including the state, are simple epiphenomena reducible to the economic 'base,'" making superfluous any inquiry into the state.²⁸ In contrast, by highlighting the importance of the state in the perpetuation of capitalist relations of production, both authors sought to provide a more sophisticated theory that took seriously the

²⁸ Nicos Poulantzas, "The Problem of the Capitalist State," in *The Poulantzas Reader: Marxism, Law, and the State*, ed. James Martin (London: Verso, 2008):172-185.

autonomy of politics from the economy that was characteristic of the capitalist mode of production, while nevertheless showing the interconnection of these two spheres.

For the purposes of the current chapter, my discussion will concentrate primarily on the arguments put forward by Miliband and Poulantzas in *The State in Capitalist Society* and *Political Power and Social Classes*. Appearing during a two year period (1968-1970) when the neo-Marxist turn had not yet taken place in the U.S., these books can be considered early representatives of the inclusion and appropriation of Marxist theory into disciplinary social science that took off in earnest from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. In addition, Miliband and Poulantzas engaged in an intermittent debate in the *New Left Review* that became a hallmark moment in the development of Marxist state theory. Since their initial exchange in the journal took place prior to the translation of *Political Power and Social Classes*, it was Poulantzas' review of Miliband that made the first impression on English-speaking audiences. There, his overly structuralist critique of Miliband drew a sharp line between competing standpoints on the state that would not be fully reconciled, but which, in the process of their exchange, articulated the key questions of the relationship of the state to society, class structure, and economic development.

When Perry Anderson suggested in his 1976 *Considerations on Western Marxism* that “Marx never produced any coherent or comparative account of the political structures of bourgeois class power at all,” he was writing in the midst of a brief but intense flourishing of the theoretical literature on Marxist theories of the state and politics.²⁹ Normatively, this growing interest in the state was motivated by the attempt to explain the persistence and reassertion of capitalism in the postwar West. Looking back on this time, Göran Therborn observed that “Marxist state theory was more than anything else a critique of capitalist democracy, and had its

²⁹ Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, 114.

sharpest analytical edge when capitalism was trying to take cover under liberal democracy.”³⁰ At the heart of these discussions was the attempt to understand how capitalist accumulation and growth continued to occur alongside the integration of the working classes into a political compromise within the welfare state, as well as the apparent inability of the democratic-pluralist model to analyze the economic and legitimation crises that emerged after 1968. Subsequently, it was carried across the Atlantic to be juxtaposed with, and eventually integrated into, a different set of intellectual positions in the American context by the early 1980s.

III. In Defense of the Ruling Class Theory

In an admiring obituary for Mills, Miliband remarked that there could hardly be serious debate about *The Power Elite*'s general thesis, “that in America, some men have enormous power denied to everyone else; that these men are, increasingly, a self-perpetuating elite; that their power is, increasingly, unchecked and irresponsible; and that their decision-making, based on an increasingly ‘military definition of reality’ and on ‘crackpot realism’, is oriented to nefarious ends.”³¹ Thus, although Miliband recognized that Mills had never been an adherent of Marxism and had given up the idea that organized labor could transform human history, he thought Mills had grasped the fundamental realities of power in postwar capitalist democracies—so much so that Miliband dedicated *The State in Capitalist Society* to Mills’ memory.

Miliband began *The State in Capitalist Society* by observing the “remarkable paradox” that despite its increasing omnipresence in all facets of political and social life, “the state itself, as a subject of political study, has long been very unfashionable” in the fields of political science and political sociology.³² Following in Mills’ footsteps, Miliband framed his book largely as a

³⁰ Göran Therborn, *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?* (London: Verso, 2010), 149.

³¹ Ralph Miliband, “C. Wright Mills,” *New Left Review* I/15 (May-June 1962): 16.

³² Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 1.

critique of pluralist and elite-oriented theories of politics put forward in works such as David Easton's *The Political System* and Robert Dahl's *Preface to Democratic Theory* and *Who Governs?*, which had attempted to explain how liberal democratic societies allocated values, distributed political power, and secured the binding consent of citizens. These works represented a larger trend toward research on government and public administration, elites and bureaucracy, parties and voting behavior, political authority and legitimation, mobilization and democratic culture—but not the state itself. Miliband's critique of these strands of research was directed toward their willful class-blindness in suggesting that in Western capitalist societies power was “competitive, fragmented and diffused,” forming competing blocs of interests rather than concentrations; in contrast, he sought to lay bare the state's presence and operations, as a “rather special institution, whose main purpose is to defend the predominance in society of a particular class.”³³

As critics like Mills had pointed out, these accounts tended to be blind to the underlying dynamics by which informal power was exercised in society along the lines of class and status. The dispersion of power between competing sectors of society suggested by pluralist analyses could not be disentangled from the ideological and political context of the Cold War. “The rapid development of pluralist-democratic political sociology after 1945,” wrote Miliband, “particularly in the United States, was largely inspired by the need to meet the ‘challenge of Marxism’ in this field more plausibly than conventional political science appeared able to do.”³⁴ Miliband said practically nothing in the book in terms of prefacing why a Marxist analysis was the best lens from which to approach the problem of the state, especially given its relative

³³ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 2, 3.

³⁴ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 5.

neglect by previous authors working in the tradition.³⁵ However, without Miliband saying as much, the entire book could be read as a Marxist social scientific critique of the ideological manner in which democratic-pluralist accounts misrepresented contestation and consensus in advanced capitalist societies.

Pluralist theory readily saw contestation among economic elites within the political process, thus forming them into distinct groupings and interests. Such was Miliband's reading of Dahl's *Who Governs?*, in which community power in New Haven was "distributed between *different* elites who are influential in *different* 'issue areas,' and whose power is 'non-cumulative.'"³⁶ Dahl had taken this "elite pluralism" as a sign of the absence of a predominant (ruling) class, so that "there are only competing blocs of interests, whose competition, which is sanctioned and guaranteed by the state itself, ensures that power *is* diffused and balanced, and that no particular interest is able to weigh too heavily upon the state."³⁷ Yet in emphasizing elite competition, these accounts also missed their high degree of cohesion and solidarity on key economic and political issues—an overlap substantial enough that one could indeed argue they made up a ruling class.³⁸ Hence, implicit in Miliband's argument was the suggestion that the scholarly denial of the existence of a ruling class and the corresponding absence of scholarly interest in the state were twin pathologies of postwar liberal democratic political science.

More importantly, it was not only sufficient to show, against the pluralist argument, that an economically dominant capitalist class *did* exist in liberal democratic societies, but also to ask "whether this dominant class also exercises a much greater degree of power and influence than

³⁵ This absence of a theoretical justification was precisely the basis for Poulantzas' critique that Miliband had not sufficiently displaced the "epistemological terrain" on which the study was to proceed.

³⁶ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 172.

³⁷ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 3. See also Robert Dahl on Mills: "A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model," *American Political Science Review* 52 (1958): 463-469.

³⁸ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 44-48.

any other class; whether it exercises as *decisive* degree of political power; whether its ownership and control of crucially important areas of economic life also insures its control of the means of political decision-making in the particular political environment of advanced capitalism.”³⁹ What Gabriel Almond observed as the “mere fact that the business community has a degree of influence disproportionate to its size” was precisely the puzzle that drew Miliband to examine the state’s role in perpetuating this imbalance.⁴⁰

To make his case, Miliband mounted an argument bolstered by empirical evidence from the United States, United Kingdom, West Germany, Italy, and France to suggest that the interests of the dominant class clearly held precedence in the policy agendas of these advanced capitalist states. His key point was that although the bourgeois-capitalist class did not simply wield state institutions as its unwilling instrument, its interests clearly predominated the policy agenda of liberal democratic states. In contrast to its supposedly impartial character, the state in capitalist society was “primarily and inevitably the guardian and protector of the economic interests which are dominant in them. Its ‘real’ purpose and mission is to ensure their continued predominance, not to prevent it.”⁴¹

Why and how did the state act in the interests of the capitalist class? For Miliband, this relationship was idiomatically captured by Marx’s famous dictum in the *Communist Manifesto* that “the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”⁴² One of the legacies of the Miliband-Poulantzas debate has been the portrayal of Miliband as an advocate of the instrumentalist conception of the state that reveals its

³⁹ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 48.

⁴⁰ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 170.

⁴¹ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 265-266

⁴² While Miliband was influenced by this formulation, his notes from the project’s gestation between 1962-1968 prove that he never accepted it uncritically; see Michael Newman, *Ralph Miliband and the Politics of the New Left* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003), 185-188.

class character by virtue of the class origins and networks of the individuals in power. This is largely a misreading of Miliband stemming from Poulantzas' original review of *The State in Capitalist Society*. In an important contrast to theories of state monopoly capitalism, Miliband suggested that “the capitalist class, as a class, does not actually ‘govern,’” and hence “the economic elites of advanced capitalist countries are not, properly speaking, a ‘governing’ class, comparable to pre-industrial, aristocratic and landowning classes.”⁴³ Since the nineteenth century, it was more often that the dominant class delegated the responsibility for state institutions to professional politicians to act as overseers of their interests.

However, it is also worth noting here—and Miliband admitted as much in his rebuttals to Poulantzas—that elites *did* play an important role in his counter-narrative to both the pluralist thesis and the related view that postwar capitalism has produced a managerial and corporate ‘new class.’ For one, the social origins of businessmen and members of the state elite did in fact lay in the upper and middle classes. These similar class origins of the capitalist class and members of the state elite, and thus their common social and ideological composition, translated into an ideological consensus on the major questions concerning the political and economic order. Thus, by virtue of their mutually held ideologies, social origins, personal networks, and vested interests in the perpetuation of the system, the sociological overlap between the economically dominant class and the state refuted the pluralist view. In addition, the “managerial revolution” of the 1950s-60s, which some had suggested created a “distinct economic and social grouping”

⁴³ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 55, 59. Fourteen years later Miliband would characterize the concept of state monopoly capitalism as problematically suggesting a “merger of the political and economic realms, whereas the real position is one of partnership, in which the political and economic realms retain a separate identity, and in which the state is able to act with considerable independence in maintaining and defending the social order of which the economically dominant class is the main beneficiary.” See Miliband, “The State,” in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. Tom Bottomore, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 522.

of managers was overstated.⁴⁴ Not only could the motives of these state managers be legitimately compared to those of the old class of owner-capitalists, but their commonality of interests in the reproduction of the capitalist system, high salaries, and social origins from upper-middle and upper-class families all spoke for the connection between occupation and social class.

Although they were ideologically committed to the preservation of the capitalist order, state elites increasingly adopted a view of themselves “as above the battles of civil society, as classless, as concerned above all to serve the whole nation, the national interest, as being charged with the particular task of subduing special interests and class-oriented demands for the supreme good of all.”⁴⁵ The preservation of the national interest had been commonly invoked by state authorities in instances of conflicts between capital and labor, in which they have had to step into as mediators—an increasingly frequent necessity within the conditions of postwar capitalism. Yet the major blind spot of pluralist-democratic theory was its assumption that capital and labor “compete on more or less equal terms, and that none of them is therefore able to achieve a decisive and permanent advantage in the process of competition.”⁴⁶ As Miliband sought to show, this suggestion belied the overwhelming empirical evidence that state institutions, including the “neutral” bureaucracy and the courts, were acting in conjunction with the interests of the capitalist class.⁴⁷

This brings us to the question of how Miliband actually conceived of the state as an entity, and his largely inductive and empirical explanation falls in line with the thematic critique of pluralism outlined above. Pluralist accounts presupposed a political arrangement where the state

⁴⁴ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 31.

⁴⁵ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 72.

⁴⁶ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 146.

⁴⁷ As Miliband wrote, “By virtue of its ideological dispositions, reinforced by its own interests, bureaucracy, on the contrary, is a crucially important and committed element in the maintenance and defence of the structure of power and privilege inherent in advanced capitalism” (*The State in Capitalist Society*, 128-129).

was “hidden” out of sight, usually referred to as the government or a more inclusive and consensus-friendly notion like the political system. In contrast, Miliband suggested that “the state’ is not a thing, that it does not, as such, exist,” but instead “stands for a number of particular institutions which, together, constitute its reality, and which interact as parts of what may be called the state system.”⁴⁸ Making up the state system were five institutional clusters: the governmental apparatus (elected legislative and executive authorities); the administrative apparatus (the bureaucracy, public corporations, central banks); the coercive apparatus (military, police, intelligence); the judicial apparatus (courts and carceral institutions); and subcentral governments (states, counties, and municipalities). The government spoke on the state’s behalf, giving this otherwise intangible object a concrete point of reference; yet treating the government as the state itself, as pluralists tended to do, obscured the distinctive aspect of state power, for “if it is believed that the government is in fact the state, it may also be believed that the assumption of governmental power is equivalent to the acquisition of state power.”⁴⁹ This was obviously not the case, as evidenced by instances in which elected social democratic governments could not exercise power over the other elements of the state, most problematically the coercive apparatus. Simply put, “The fact that the government does speak in the name of the state and is formally *invested* with state power, does not mean that it effectively *controls* that power.”⁵⁰

In turn, this state system was embedded within a larger “political system” including institutions such as parties, pressure groups, corporations, religious institutions, and the mass media—those elements making up the essential parts of civil society in liberal democracies that played a key role in mitigating the contradictions inherent to capitalist social relations. Ideological hegemony originated from within these cultural institutions under the control of the

⁴⁸ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 49.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 49-50.

dominant classes. Yet this broader political system needed to be distinguished from the state, so as not to extend the already-nebulous boundaries of the state concept as an explanation of all political phenomena, and for purposes of observational and empirical clarity.⁵¹ For this reason, while Miliband saw that “the ‘engineering of consent’ in capitalist society is still largely an unofficial private enterprise,” at the same time he noted that the postwar liberal state had taken on an increasingly important role in the process of political socialization, intervening in ideological competition to become “one of the main architects of the conservative consensus.”⁵²

This analytic separation of the state from the political system distinguished Miliband from pluralist and functionalist arguments. Both Easton and Almond had previously written of the political system in order to describe political interactions within civil society and the actual public institutions through which they were channeled into policy. In addition, it also distinguished Miliband from Poulantzas, who at the time critiqued Miliband for maintaining a purely ideological separation of the public (the state) and the private (civil society). In contrast, Miliband held the two poles in tension rather than reducing one to the other, either by emphasizing the social origins of state policies (Easton) or by rejecting the state-civil society binary as an ideological one (Poulantzas).

However, while this separation of the state (state system, institutions) from the larger political system may have afforded a degree of empirical verifiability to Miliband’s claims, his discussion of ideology and the processes of state legitimation also revealed some underlying problems to his analysis, due in part to its theoretical underdevelopment. There was an unresolved tension between arguing that the state was under the empirically demonstrable influence of the dominant classes, and in arguing that this influence was the result of an

⁵¹ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 54.

⁵² Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 183.

ideological cohesion. Miliband's attempt to show the existence of the capitalist state through examining its particular institutions and the networks of political and economic elites still did not account for the operational unity of the state system as a whole. The various and distinct state subsystems he identified were not presented along with a convincing explanation as to why these "interacting institutions" would operate as a coherent unity.⁵³ If the state admittedly did not really exist, what provided the institutional cohesion required to treat it as an object of analysis?

To resolve this paradox, Miliband had to emphasize ideology as providing the unity for the state and the larger political system. One reason why the state played such an important role in Miliband's analysis was exactly because it allowed for the smooth functioning of an inherently contradictory system, preventing it from coming apart in a legitimation crisis toward which it naturally tended. The ideological institutions were so important for legitimating the ruling class that he went so far as to claim that the potential of the subordinate classes increasingly thinking of an alternative social order posed "the greatest of all dangers to the capitalist system."⁵⁴ However, the recourse to ideology and legitimation still left open the questions of what mechanisms facilitated the necessary political class-consciousness by the capitalist class, and what necessitated the ideological system to produce the single, coherent vision required for it to function.⁵⁵

Miliband's reliance on ideology as a residual form of explanation clashed with the methodological premises of his critique of pluralism. For while the pluralists either discarded the state concept altogether or operated with a very circumscribed definition, their rationale was based on a social model in which the allocation of values in society and the political system were functionally intertwined. In contrast, Miliband based his analysis on a conception of the state

⁵³ Clyde W. Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 28-30.

⁵⁴ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 260.

⁵⁵ Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State*, 27-30.

where its institutional outposts were occupied by members of dominant class, but which still relied on a quasi-functionalist explanation for its operation. Although it would be unfair to characterize Miliband as a crude instrumentalist, he occasionally came close with such formulations as how in certain regimes (although usually not those of advanced capitalism) “the men who control the state” have the ability to repress the opposition.⁵⁶ Yet at other times, Miliband verged on functionalism in his depictions of the educational system, the family, and of nationalism. Nationalism especially was the “supreme ‘integrative’ and stabilizing force in society, the ‘functional’ creed *par excellence*.”⁵⁷ That this was not merely a paraphrasing of his opponents’ views was made evident in the following pages, with claims such as that “The state itself, through a variety of its institutions and by a variety of means, has also played a notable and ever-growing part in the fostering of a view of national allegiance eminently ‘functional’ to the existing social order.”⁵⁸ Not only did Miliband here ascribe agency and subjectivity to something which he earlier said did not exist as such (“the state...fostering”), but muddling the issue further was that this sentence was found in a chapter on the process of “political legitimation” also dealing with the role of political parties and churches—all of which were *not* state institutions but parts of the broader political system.

Therefore, Miliband was unable to analytically sustain the distinction between his three components of the state, the state system, and the political system. Lacking sufficient theoretical refinement, his analysis was unable to conceptually untangle diffuse and unwieldy social phenomena he was attempting to outline. As a result, while he thoroughly documented the intertwining of business and political interests, on the theoretical level his analysis frequently vacillated between a conception of ruling elites wielding state power for their purposes, and a

⁵⁶ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 179.

⁵⁷ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 206.

⁵⁸ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 209.

functionalist conception in which a highly permeable combination of the state and the political system (or civil society) effectively reproduced capitalist rule as part of its own internal logic.

The State in Capitalist Society was construed as a response to theories of state monopoly capitalism; for although Miliband saw that in the postwar years state intervention was only accelerating the interrelation between the two spheres, this did not necessarily mean the state acted on the monopolies' behest. As he wrote, "Governments, acting in the name of the state, have in fact been compelled over the years to act against *some* property rights, to erode *some* managerial prerogatives, to help redress *somewhat* the balance between capital and labor, between property and those who are subject to it."⁵⁹ This meant that a degree of state independence (although *not* state neutrality) was characteristic of all Western societies. However, although Miliband rejected economic determinism, his analysis did not truly move beyond the base-superstructure model. Although the state and the political system were not mere emanations of an underlying material base, and despite the apparent importance of class consciousness for the overcoming of capitalism, he held on to the conventional Marxist position that the "fatal paradox" of capitalist societies lay in the contradiction between the increasingly socialized forms of production, which involved a high degree of planning and coordination, and the private appropriation of surplus value by those in control of the economic system's material resources.⁶⁰

Like all seminal works, *The State in Capitalist Society* posed as many questions as it answered. While past challenges to pluralism were still largely grounded in the conventional perspective of interest-group liberalism, *The State in Capitalist Society* proved an influential, if

⁵⁹ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 77.

⁶⁰ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 268.

flawed, work by providing a critique of pluralism from a Marxist position.⁶¹ While Miliband's study provided a strong refutation of pluralist arguments, it was nevertheless weaker when it came to the advancement of a Marxist *theory* of the state. In part, this was because having taken up the challenge to refute pluralism, he understandably concentrated on those aspects which provided the most evidence to the contrary. This left Miliband open to the criticisms of instrumentalism advanced by Poulantzas.

IV. Theorizing the Capitalist State

Miliband was aware that just as he was completing his own work on the state, Poulantzas had published *Political Power and Social Classes*, just prior to the May 1968 uprisings in Paris. In the opening pages of *The State in Capitalist Society* he called Poulantzas' book a "major attempt at a theoretical elaboration of the Marxist 'model' of the state."⁶² *Political Power and Social Classes* stands as Poulantzas' most systematic attempt at developing a typology of the capitalist state and an account of its role in the capitalist mode of production. That said, the degree to which Poulantzas succeeded in this project has been subject to much debate, as a number of scholars have noted the evolution of his views on the state over the course of his brief career.⁶³ Yet since it was *Political Power and Social Classes* and his critique of Miliband that introduced Poulantzas to Anglo-American audiences, in the current discussion I will focus

⁶¹ See Kesselman, "The Conflictual Evolution of American Political Science." Kariel, *The Decline of American Pluralism*; Lowi, *The End of Liberalism*; and Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, "Two Faces of Power," *American Political Science Review* 56 (1962): 947-952.

⁶² Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 7fn1.

⁶³ Bob Jessop's intellectual biography *Nicos Poulantzas: Marxist Theory and Political Strategy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985) remains the most authoritative and comprehensive account of the development of Poulantzas' thought. For a more condensed version that captures Poulantzas' intellectual shift, see Martin Carnoy, *The State and Political Theory* (Princeton University Press, 1984), 97-127. For a summary and critique specifically of *Political Power and Social Classes*, see Amy Beth Bridges, "Nicos Poulantzas and the Marxist Theory of the State," *Politics & Society* 4 (1974): 161-190.

primarily on these works, reserving partial discussions of Poulantzas' subsequent works to later chapters.

As it became apparent during their debate, Poulantzas approached the topic of the capitalist state from a radically different epistemological perspective than Miliband. More so here than in subsequent works, *Political Power and Social Classes* borrowed its starting point from Louis Althusser.⁶⁴ For Poulantzas, the purpose of historical materialism was the study of the different structures and practices making up a given mode of production, and the theoretical clarification of “abstract-formal objects” such as the capitalist state. In the key difference with Miliband, this task was to be conducted not through an inductive form of historical or empirical inquiry, but rather through the theoretical production of appropriate concepts leading to the attainment of scientific knowledge about a particular object—in this case, the capitalist state.⁶⁵

Poulantzas' starting point was the mode of production, another abstract-formal object understood as a “specific combination of various structures and practices which, in combination, appear as so many instances or levels, i.e. as so many regional structures of this mode.”⁶⁶ All modes of production, whether ancient, feudal, or capitalist, were composed of several instances or levels—divided by Althusser in *Reading Capital* into the economic, political, ideological, and theoretical—which together made up a complex whole that was in the last instance determined by the economic. What distinguished one mode of production from another was the articulation,

⁶⁴ However, Poulantzas was also critical of aspects of Althusser's work; see Poulantzas, “Towards a Marxist Theory,” in *The Poulantzas Reader*, 139-165. Jessop (*Nicos Poulantzas*, 54, 61) suggests that much of the first half of *PPSC* was a critique of Althusser's structural Marxism. These observations notwithstanding, Poulantzas' consistent use of Althusserian terminology in the book categorizes it as a work at least strongly by that school of thought.

⁶⁵ For in-depth discussions of Althusser and structural Marxism, see Robert Paul Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Ted Benton, *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism: Althusser and His Influence* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984); Gregory Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009).

⁶⁶ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 13.

or specific relationship, between these levels. In addition, within any given historically determined social formation (such as France under Louis Bonaparte or England during the Industrial Revolution) a number of abstract ‘pure’ modes of production overlapped in a manner that overdetermined the entire matrix. In the Althusserian sense of theoretical practice, developing a “regional” theory of the capitalist state meant undertaking the theoretical task of producing the appropriate concept of the political superstructure.⁶⁷ Poulantzas thus stated that “the object of this book is *the political*, in particular the political superstructure of the state in the CMP,” and the further production of related concepts.⁶⁸

As an abstract-formal object, the capitalist state was not an empirically tangible entity, but instead served as the condition of knowledge of real-concrete objects, meaning actually existing capitalist states within a given social formation.⁶⁹ Since the form that the political took in relation to the other levels was structurally determined by the mode of production, there could not be a general theory of the state as such. However, what made the capitalist mode of production unique was that within it, the political region (or the state) was relatively autonomous from the economic and ideological regions; unlike the conditions of feudalism, extra-economic force was no longer involved in the processes of production and accumulation of capital. While within the capitalist mode of production the economic level could be assumed to have both the dominant and the determinant role, the relative autonomy of the political level allowed for it to be analyzed independently as a structural feature of the entire matrix.⁷⁰

Due to its prevalence of Althusserian terminology and starting premises, *Political Power and Social Classes* is frequently considered to be one of the exemplary works of structural

⁶⁷ Clyde W. Barrow, “The Miliband-Poulantzas Debate: An Intellectual History,” in *Paradigm Lost*, 13.

⁶⁸ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 16.

⁶⁹ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 12-13.

⁷⁰ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 16-17.

Marxism. Although Poulantzas would subsequently associate “structuralism” with bourgeois, rather than Marxist, social science, the notion of structure does play a key role in this work as both the underlying “organizing matrix” of various institutions, and the conceptual means by which this matrix could be theorized and explained.⁷¹ Importantly, Poulantzas insisted on a distinction between structures and practices: what he called, respectively, “*the juridico-political superstructure of the state*, which can be designated as *the political*, and political class practices (political class struggle) which can be designated as *politics*.”⁷² Poulantzas maintained that political practice had as its object the conjuncture, the “present moment” in which the contradictions and uneven development of the various levels of a social formation were condensed. But if the strategic objective of Marxist political practice was the present moment, understanding its effects in turn required a theory of the state in the capitalist mode of production, focusing on “the political structures (what are called the ‘political superstructure’) of a mode of production and of a social formation consist[ing] of *the institutionalized power of the state*.”⁷³

On the most general level of the mode of production, the role of the state was to act as the “factor of cohesion between the levels of a social formation...in the sense of the cohesion of the ensemble of the levels of a complex unity, and as the regulating factor of its global equilibrium as a system.”⁷⁴ The state was precisely the nodal point where a given social formation’s structures were unified and articulated, and also in which the contradictions found at its various levels were condensed: “The political superstructure of the state is a privileged place which

⁷¹ Poulantzas emphasized that structures were irreducible to specific economic, political, or ideological institutions. Institutions were socially sanctioned systems of norms, while structures were the constellation in which these appeared and were reproduced. “Structure is not the simple principle of organization which is exterior to the institution: the structure is present in an allusive and inverted form in the institution itself” (*Political Power and Social Classes*, 115).

⁷² Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 37.

⁷³ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 42.

⁷⁴ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 44-45.

concentrates the contradictions of the levels of the structure and permits the concrete decipherment of their connection.”⁷⁵ This general function of the state also covered more specific modalities (such as the economic and ideological) of a social formation, but these were ultimately overdetermined by the state’s strictly political function in relation to the class struggle. In Poulantzas’ words, the state’s political function was directly related to political class domination, “precisely in so far as it maintains, in the ensemble of structures, that place and role which have the *effect* (in their unity) of dividing a formation into classes and producing political class domination.”⁷⁶

These dual features of cohesion and condensation were key for understanding how the state, viewed in terms of a *general* theory of historical materialism, was a theoretically-derived concept through which the reproduction of a mode of production and the transition from one mode to another could be explained. However, the *particular* theory of the capitalist mode of production and the even more concrete *regional* theory of the capitalist state included more specific qualities in addition to the general ones of cohesion and condensation. Notably, the two characteristic features of the political level in the capitalist mode of production were the state’s internal unity and its relative autonomy from the dominant classes and the class struggle more broadly.

Both features were inherent to the structural location and purpose of the state within the capitalist mode of production, having to do with the state’s relation to the class struggle.⁷⁷ Poulantzas sought to avoid the problem of reifying the state as an independent subject possessing something akin to a “State will.” Instead, his conception of the state is best understood as one of relational power (although he would not fully develop this idea until his final work *State, Power,*

⁷⁵ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 95.

⁷⁶ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 51.

⁷⁷ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 255-257.

Socialism). He maintained that the state overdetermined political practices and the class struggle, in the sense that “the state sets the *limits* within which the class struggle affects it; *the play of its institutions allows and makes possible* this relative autonomy from the dominant classes and fractions.”⁷⁸ However, he was also careful to point out that this did not mean the state merely conditioned or exhaustively determined the shape that class struggles took in a social formation. Instead, there was a relational dynamic between the two, so that “the field of the class struggle has fundamental effects on this state, effects which are realized within the limits set by its structures to the extent that they control a set of variations.”⁷⁹ Therefore, both its unity and its relative autonomy were ways in which the capitalist state absorbed, conditioned, and mediated the class struggle to create outcomes that reproduced the social formation in which it was situated.

Poulantzas suggested that the unity of the capitalist state was expressed by a specific internal cohesion of its institutions that prevented the class struggle from dividing or sharing in its power. Like Miliband, he was critical of pluralist accounts that diffused political power among interest groups, parties, and other segments of society; however, there were important epistemological differences, for as we saw, Poulantzas rejected the “simplistic and vulgarized conception which saw in the state the tool or instrument of the dominant class,” which he would soon associate with Miliband, and the attempt to link the hegemonic class to the state bureaucracy by virtue of their social origins, which he associated with Mills.⁸⁰ In rejecting these views, Poulantzas maintained that the capitalist state was a class state, but unambiguously *not* in the sense that there was a direct and unmediated connection between the subjective preferences of the dominant class and state policy.

⁷⁸ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 289.

⁷⁹ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 188.

⁸⁰ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 256, 336.

Furthermore, Poulantzas rejected Marxist and Weberian accounts that saw state institutions as expressing a form of “state power.” In contrast to Miliband, who viewed state power as a characteristic inherent to the state in a capitalist society, Poulantzas drew a sharp distinction between state power and the state apparatuses, arguing that state institutions cannot be viewed as repositories of independent power, and therefore, as being autonomous of class power and the class struggle.⁸¹ While the state was “the centre of the exercise of political power,” its various institutions did not retain this power on their own, but rather possessed their own autonomy and channeled the power dynamics emerging from the political class struggle in a given social formation.⁸² Therefore, state power was always “the power of a determinate class to whose interests (rather than to those of other social classes) the state corresponds.”⁸³

Rather than assuming an ideologically cohesive and unified power elite or ruling class from the outset, Poulantzas suggested that the principal task of the capitalist state was to enable the creation and reproduction of this unity. Since the fragmentation of the capitalist class into antagonistic fractions was inherent to the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production, the state provided the terrain on which the hegemonic fraction of the capitalist class could organize itself from out of a diverse set of interests. The state was not “a machine or an instrument, a simple object coveted by the various classes; nor is it divided into parts which, if not in the hands of some, must automatically be in the hands of others.” Rather, it was an institutional matrix or “an ensemble of structures” that allowed the capitalist class to perpetuate its long-term *political* interests, while fractions of it simultaneously continued to compete on the economic level.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Barrow, “The Miliband-Poulantzas Debate,” 28.

⁸² Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 115.

⁸³ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 100.

⁸⁴ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 288.

The relative power of the state was manifested in a double relationship to the class struggle. On one hand, the state, as a juridical-political superstructure, assumed a relative autonomy to the dominant classes by constituting their exclusive political power. It organized the fractioned capitalist class into a unified power bloc, representing its political interests and forming the organized center of their political struggle against the working class.⁸⁵ This did not mean that the state either authorized the dominant classes to participate in political power or granted parcels of its institutionalized power to them in an instrumentalist manner. Instead, its role was to “constitute the unity of the dominant class(es) out of the isolation of their economic struggle, and by means of a whole political-ideological operation of its own, to constitute their strictly political interests as representative of the general interest of the people/nation.”⁸⁶ The capitalist state enabled the formation of a ‘power bloc’ composed of several politically dominant classes or fractions, with one fraction in particular holding a key hegemonic role. This hegemonic fraction concentrated in itself both the ability to maintain an equilibrium among the dominant classes, and simultaneously, to represent the general interest of the people or nation.⁸⁷

While the capitalist state concentrated the power of the capitalist class, it simultaneously diffused working class power. Through the ideological workings of its institutions, it concealed its class character by representing itself as a “popular-national-class” state, as the “incarnation of the popular will of the people/nation.” In place of the socioeconomic isolation characteristic of capitalist societies, the state substituted a new unity of the people/nation. The people/nation appeared as an ensemble of juridically-isolated ‘citizens’ or ‘individuals’ who could be represented by the state.⁸⁸ The state therefore had an individualizing effect on its subjects by

⁸⁵ Carnoy, *The State and Political Theory*, 103.

⁸⁶ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 137.

⁸⁷ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 141.

⁸⁸ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 133.

isolating them into individuals and obstructing the commonality of the class struggle. Simultaneously, it deployed its ideological and repressive techniques to individualize the members of the working class as juridical subjects, thereby preventing them from coalescing into a revolutionary movement.

The unification of the capitalist class, and the juridical isolation and ideological unification of the working classes, were the dual aspects of the state's relation to the class struggle. To summarize this, we may quote a key passage:

“[The capitalist state's] function is to disorganize the dominated classes politically, and at the same time to organize the dominant classes politically; to prevent the dominated classes from being present in its centre as classes, whilst introducing the dominant classes there as classes; by relating itself to the dominated classes as representative of the unity of the people-nation, whilst at the same time relating itself to the dominant classes *qua* politically organized classes. In short, this state exists as a state of the dominant *classes* whilst excluding from its centre the class ‘struggle.’”⁸⁹

The fact that the state perpetuated the long-term *political* interests of the dominant class without simply acting at that class's behest meant that it possessed some degree of (relative) autonomy. By taking charge of the bourgeoisie's political interests and realizing its political hegemony, it could intervene to arrange compromises between it and the working class, sometimes against the short-term *economic* interests of some fraction of the dominant class that might be opposed to such a compromise.⁹⁰ In doing so, the state could not only strike an uneasy equilibrium between the hegemonic class fraction and the power bloc it formed, but the social measures it provided could also help legitimate the political status quo in the eyes of the dominated classes. The state's relative autonomy, “which is a function of its unifying feature as national-popular-state is, in the last analysis, only that autonomy necessary for the hegemonic organization of the

⁸⁹ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 189.

⁹⁰ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 284-285.

dominant classes; i.e. it is only that relative autonomy which is indispensable for the unambiguous power of these classes.”⁹¹

Bob Jessop has called Poulantzas “the first postwar theorist to break with the flawed methodologies of the dominant traditions in Marxist state theory.”⁹² His theorization of the relative autonomy of the capitalist state and the attempt to move beyond a reductive base-superstructure model of society indeed became the crucial point around which subsequent debates proceeded. However, as critics have pointed out, *Political Power and Social Classes*, was a theoretically ambitious work that also had a number of shortcomings. First, the charge of functionalism has frequently been made against Poulantzas’ early works and *Political Power and Social Classes* in particular. One contemporary critique suggested that rather than initiating a break with bourgeois social science, Poulantzas’ indebtedness to Althusser led him to reproduce structural-functionalist ideas and to understate of the importance of the class struggle.⁹³ Usually pairing this with charges of excessive formalism, observers have pointed out that Poulantzas had begun by assuming a unity of the capitalist social formation and developed a conception of the state that fit the task; however, by operating at a high level of abstraction, he did not provide a satisfactory account of the mechanisms by which the state was constrained by the “reason of the system” itself—essentially substituting an effect for the cause, in a way characteristic of functionalist explanations.⁹⁴

Secondly, it has also been pointed out that *Political Power and Social Classes* suffered from a problem of what may be called an overly politicist account of the state.⁹⁵ By insisting on

⁹¹ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 289.

⁹² Jessop, *Nicos Poulantzas*, 60.

⁹³ Simon Clarke, “Marxism, Sociology and Poulantzas’s Theory of the State,” in *The State Debate*, ed. Simon Clarke (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1991): 62-96.

⁹⁴ Das, “State Theories,” 35.

⁹⁵ Jessop, *Nicos Poulantzas*, 53-54.

the theoretical separation of the economic and the political levels, Poulantzas largely omitted discussing the capitalist state's economic institutions and functions. Thus, toward the end of the 1970s, Poulantzas' work thus became a target of critique for the German state derivationist school, which maintained that it was a fundamental mistake to treat Marx's *Capital* as primarily an analysis of the economic level and to attempt to supplement it with an analysis of the political level as an autonomous and specific object of science, as Poulantzas had done.⁹⁶ This theoretical move, the derivationists argued, only uncritically accepted and reproduced the fragmentation of bourgeois society into relatively autonomous structures and, in emphasizing the state's relative autonomy, missed the degree to which it was constrained by the general contradictions of the process of capital accumulation.⁹⁷

These critiques were first articulated during the mid to late 1970s, when Poulantzas had already moved away from these positions. However, it was his 1969 review of Miliband's *The State in Capitalist Society* that, by introducing his ideas to a wider Anglo-American audience, made apparent the full implications of his views on the state. While Poulantzas' review proved to be an influential deconstruction of Miliband's own position, that piece also saw Poulantzas at his most structuralist, which in turn allowed Miliband to first articulate some of the criticisms that subsequently became linked to Poulantzas in the eyes of readers. Together, the Miliband-Poulantzas debate came to represent the polarized opposition between instrumentalist and structuralist conceptions of the state that soon was picked up as a starting point among mainstream social scientific debates addressing the nature and role of the capitalist state.

⁹⁶ See John Holloway and Sol Picciotto, "Introduction: Towards a Materialist Theory of the State," in *State and Capital: A Marxist Debate*, ed. Holloway and Picciotto (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1978), 1-31.

VI. The Miliband-Poulantzas Debate

Political Power and Social Classes and *The State in Capitalist Society* represented two highly distinct approaches to studying the state, providing additional evidence of the mutability of the state as an object of analysis, and of the gaps in Marxist approaches to the topic.⁹⁸ Miliband had understood the *Communist Manifesto*'s formulation that "the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" to be a core statement that ran through the entire corpus of Marx's writings.⁹⁹ His focus therefore fell on providing empirical and historical evidence to flesh out the fragmented theoretical accounts found in Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Gramsci, although his emphasis leaned toward an institutionalist conception of state power closer to that of Weber and Mills.¹⁰⁰ In contrast, Poulantzas was working within a framework heavily influenced by Althusser and Gramsci.¹⁰¹ While he also saw himself as teasing out the political implications found in those thinkers, his approach emphasized a deeper and more selective mining of Marxist texts including Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* and *The Civil War in France*, Engels's *Anti-Duhring*, Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, and Gramsci's *Notes on Machiavelli*.¹⁰²

Considering their distinct epistemic starting points, perhaps it is not surprising that Miliband and Poulantzas were unable to come to a consensus over the course of their subsequent

⁹⁸ See Robert B. Alford and Roger Friedland, *Powers of Theory: Capitalism, the State, and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 278-279), for a suggestion that Miliband and Poulantzas were operating on two distinct levels of abstraction: the former on the level of organizational analysis while the latter on the level of class.

⁹⁹ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 5.

¹⁰⁰ Although see Ira Katznelson, "Lenin or Weber? Choices in Marxist Theories of Politics" (*Political Studies* 29 [1981]: 632-640), which points out that the Miliband of *Marxism and Politics* was skeptical of how much could be "squeezed out of a paragraph, a phrase, an allusion or a metaphor" (*Marxism and Politics*, 2). The subtle reference to Poulantzas' approach in the wake of their debate is notable.

¹⁰¹ Barrow, "The Miliband-Poulantzas Debate," 28.

¹⁰² Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 21.

exchanges. Later scholarship has criticized the debate for increasingly becoming fixated on questions of Marxist methodology and epistemology, as over the course of their dialogue the two authors took increasingly polarized stances. This has led Jessop to call the exchange a “dialogue of the deaf;” while Clyde Barrow suggests it simultaneously “brought an end to the idea that there is something called *the* Marxist theory of the state” and “began the fragmentation of Marxist political theory into pieces that may never be reassembled into a coherent synthesis.”¹⁰³

Yet despite this absence of a synthesis and its fragmentation of Marxist theory, the *New Left Review* debate proved to be seminal for a generation of scholarship in defining the boundaries and scope of inquiry that discussions on the state would take. It consisted of four exchanges, initiated when Poulantzas subjected *The State in Capitalist Society* to an extended review in the November-December 1969 issue of *NLR*, which generated a response by Miliband in 1970. Three years later, Miliband took up the offensive in an even more critical review of *Political Power and Social Classes*, on the occasion of its translation into English. Following an intervention by Ernesto Laclau in 1975, Poulantzas wrote a concluding response to his two interlocutors that was published in early 1976.¹⁰⁴ As their subsequent major works in the wake of the debate showed (namely, Miliband’s *Marxism and Politics* was published in 1977, and Poulantzas’ *State, Power, Socialism* in 1978), both authors made important modifications to their

¹⁰³ Bob Jessop, “Dialogue of the Deaf: Some Reflections on the Poulantzas-Miliband Debate,” in *Class, Power and the State in Capitalist Society: Essays on Ralph Miliband*, eds. Paul Wetherly, Clyde W. Barrow, and Peter Burnham (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 132-157; Clyde W. Barrow, “The Marx Problem in Marxian State Theory,” *State & Society* 64 (2000): 89. Jessop suggests that Poulantzas and Miliband could have plausibly been talking about two different phenomena: for whereas Poulantzas was primarily concerned with developing an abstract conception of *the capitalist state*, Miliband’s was an empirical analysis of *the state as a real-concrete phenomenon in capitalist society*. See also Barrow, “Ralph Miliband and the Instrumentalist Theory of the State: The (Mis)Construction of an Analytic Concept” in the same volume.

¹⁰⁴ Although they never met in person, the original interactions between Miliband and Poulantzas were a series of complementary private letters during 1968-1969; see Newman, *Ralph Miliband and the Politics of the New Left*, 202-205.

initial stances. By that point, however, the debate had influenced a number of newer commentaries that tended to treat it as a confrontation between instrumentalist and structuralist approaches to the state. It was this latter legacy that became the lens through which Marxist theory was received in American political science.

Taking the debate as a whole, it is possible to focus on three issues that were raised, and which together framed the parameters of later subsequent scholarship on Marxist state theory.¹⁰⁵

First, insofar as Miliband and Poulantzas staked out their respective positions on the character and role of the capitalist liberal-democratic state, they essentially defined the boundaries within which subsequent engagements with this question would occur. Through their attempts at establishing the links between the state and class structures, both authors found themselves confronted with meta-theoretical difficulties, each of whom gladly pointed them out for the other. Their contrasting views on the conceptual distinction between political elites and the ruling class, and the degree to which the state could be said to act on their behalf, became a point of contention. In the process, they made important observations about the epistemic presuppositions of Marxist methodology and the relationship between ideology and science in the study of politics and the state.

Second, the debate concentrated on the question of the state's relative autonomy. The critique of economism shared by both authors raised the question of the degree to which state autonomy occurred, in what historical and political circumstances it was more likely to take place, and the specific institutional processes through which it was manifested. While both were concerned with refuting theories of state monopoly capitalism that minimized the autonomy of the state, their respective epistemological starting points meant they could not come to an

¹⁰⁵ One important exception was the absence of a discussion about the state in relation to the demands of capital accumulation, which subsequently became the critical thrust of the German derivationist position with regard to the inadequacies of the Miliband-Poulantzas debate.

agreement on the relation of class power to state power. As Laclau perceptively noted at the time, they were analyzing different problems: whereas Miliband sought to refute pluralism by showing the *unity* between the fraction in control of state power and the dominant classes, Poulantzas was interested in the *separation* between the fraction in control of the state and the dominant classes.¹⁰⁶ This epistemic dissonance led each author to arrive at the conclusion that the other was trapped in a form of economic determinism, whether originating in the sociological networks of the relevant actors (Miliband) *or* in the structural requirements of the system itself (Poulantzas).

Lastly, since both Miliband and Poulantzas were essentially concerned with theorizing the “superstructures” of capitalist societies and their role in mitigating the contradictory nature of capitalism, they inevitably encountered the question of ideology and political legitimation. While both attributed an important function to legitimating institutions such as the media, the school system, political parties, and trade unions, their meta-theoretical differences once again led them to disagree on the extent to which these institutions could be considered parts of the state. As we saw above, Miliband put forward an institutional conception of the state situated within a larger political system, while occasionally blurring their boundaries. On the other hand, Poulantzas adopted an extensive conception of the state by rejecting the distinction between public and private, but nevertheless suggested that this boundary *was* drawn within the social formation by the state itself. The debate thus posed the question of whether there was a capitalist state (Poulantzas) or whether it was sufficient to speak of a state in capitalist society (Miliband). Given the conceptual elusiveness of the state concept, therefore, the debate touched upon one of

¹⁰⁶ Ernesto Laclau, “The Specificity of the Political,” in Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (London: Verso, 2011), 66.

the key questions surrounding state theory and the relationship between institutionalized political power and its juridical and ideological legitimation.

The debate can thus be parsed into three thematic issues (although they were closely woven together in the actual arguments):

- 1) The question of a “Marxist methodology” and the meta-theoretical presuppositions necessary for studying the state.
- 2) The question of the state’s relative autonomy and the relationship between the state and the capitalist class.
- 3) The connection between the state and the ideological institutions of capitalist society.

In the following pages, these points will be discussed in turn. An attempt will be made to keep the debate’s chronological dynamic intact, but occasionally this will be overlooked for the purposes of thematic cohesion.

1. Marxist Methodology: Reviewing *The State in Capitalist Society*, Poulantzas praised it as an important contribution to a neglected question within the Marxist tradition. However, he leveled a series of pointed critiques that challenged what he saw as the book’s theoretical underdevelopment, in that it lacked the conceptual framing necessary for conducting his investigation from the position of a truly scientific Marxism. Most importantly, Miliband had not sufficiently developed an alternative “problematic” to those of the pluralist and elite-centric theories of social science.¹⁰⁷ The proper way was first to develop an alternative set of concepts from within a different problematic, so as to displace the intellectual terrain on which the critique was to occur. If, as Poulantzas wrote, “a precondition of any scientific approach to the ‘concrete’

¹⁰⁷ The *problématique* is a key concept for Althusser’s project of reconstructing Marxism through the lens of structuralism, defined as “the theoretical or ideological framework” in which a word or concept is used. Importantly, this includes not just what is outright stated by a text but also the absence of certain problems and concepts within it, thus revealing an underlying ideological bias. See Althusser, *For Marx*, 253-254.

is to make explicit the epistemological principles of its own treatment of it,” then Miliband had neither made his own position explicit nor successfully refuted those of his opponents.¹⁰⁸ Rather than challenging the ideological notion of elites altogether, he argued that they constituted a ruling class, thereby attempting to refute pluralism with concrete facts, without noticing that he remained on the conceptual terrain of mainstream social science. For this reason Miliband came dangerously close to claiming that the role of the state in capitalist society could be demonstrated via the participation of ruling class elites in governance, thereby reducing the functions of the state to the conduct and behavior of the members of the state apparatus. For Poulantzas, “Miliband constantly gives the impression that for him social classes or ‘groups’ are in some way reducible to *inter-personal relations*, that the state is reducible to inter-personal relations of the members of the diverse ‘groups’ that constitute the state apparatus.”¹⁰⁹ As an example of this focus on groups rather than class fractions, Poulantzas pointed to Miliband’s undue attention to the motivations of corporate managers rather than to their objective place in the relations of production.

After suggesting that Miliband’s work was thus indicative of a “problematic of the subject” characteristic of both Weberianism and functionalism, Poulantzas stressed the objective rather than interpersonal, character of the relationship between the bourgeois class and the state. Whereas Miliband’s theoretical premises prevented him from seeing this objective system, Poulantzas maintained that “if the *function* of the state in a determinate social formation and the *interests* of the dominant class in this formation *coincide*, it is by reason of the system itself.”¹¹⁰ The direct participation of the members of the ruling class in the state was not a cause, but a contingent effect of the otherwise *necessary* role that the state played in the reproduction of

¹⁰⁸ Poulantzas, “The Problem of the Capitalist State,” 174.

¹⁰⁹ Poulantzas, “The Problem of the Capitalist State,” 175.

¹¹⁰ Poulantzas, “The Problem of the Capitalist State,” 178.

capitalism. By emphasizing the state's functional role within the capitalist mode of production, rather than the class composition of the state apparatus at a given point in time, Poulantzas was attempting to avoid the economistic reduction of the state to the interests of particular individuals making up a class, which he saw as the consequence of Miliband's study. Since individuals were primarily the bearers (*Träger*) of objective structures, their motivations, networks, or class backgrounds mattered only insofar as they were the ideological products of an objective position within a given social formation. "The state apparatus," as Poulantzas put in perhaps his most structuralist moment, "forms an *objective system* of special 'branches' whose relation presents a *specific internal unity* and obeys, to a large extent, *its own logic*."¹¹¹ While Poulantzas backed off the Althusserian position about the scientific integrity of theoretical practice in his second contribution to their debate, he continued to maintain that Miliband's approach was "empiricist or neo-positivist" and was subject to a theoretically undifferentiated "demagogy of the 'empirically real.'"¹¹²

Miliband's defense of his work against this methodological critique pointed to what he called Poulantzas' structural super-determinism and structural abstractionism, which he saw as coming at the expense of concrete historical and social analyses. Miliband was aware of the existence of *Political Power and Social Classes* while he was completing *The State in Capitalist Society*; however, despite his amiable personal letters to Poulantzas at the time his own book's publication, their more acrimonious public exchange suggest he was consistently skeptical of the project's theoretical underpinnings.¹¹³ Miliband saw in Poulantzas a misguided continuation of an Althusserianism that neither evaluated empirical and historical facts nor exegetically

¹¹¹ Poulantzas, "The Problem of the Capitalist State," 181.

¹¹² Nicos Poulantzas, "The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau," in *The Poulantzas Reader*, 275.

¹¹³ See Newman, *Ralph Miliband and the Politics of the New Left*, 203-204.

elaborated on select Marxist texts, but instead used these texts as raw material to provide a “particular theorization” of the capitalist state. This resulted in a representation of the capitalist state as an ahistorical abstraction and lost sight of the necessity of empirical inquiry as a way of evaluating counterposing problematics. “After all,” as he wrote, “it was none other than Marx who stressed the importance of empirical validation (or invalidation) and who spent many years of his life in precisely such an undertaking.”¹¹⁴ Moreover, when it came to the question of whether the notions of economic elites and the dominant class were incompatible, Miliband suggested that arriving at the “concrete reality” toward which all analysis aimed involved the appropriation and critical use of concepts (such as that of the elite) that indeed may belong to ideologically opposing paradigms. Although Miliband did not develop this argument much further, the risk of ideological “contamination” was less of a problem for him than disregarding the need for empirical validation by recourse to abstract theoreticism.

2. *The Relative Autonomy of the State*: The disagreement over a Marxist method was most visible regarding the key substantive point of the debate: the state’s role in the reproduction of capitalist relations and to the ruling class. While Poulantzas acknowledged that Miliband rightly rejected the characterization of the state as an instrument manipulated by the ruling class, Miliband’s focus on demonstrating the common inter-personal relations of the members of the state apparatus and the dominant class resulted in an account that eroded the state’s relative autonomy. If the dominant class directly controlled the state apparatus or if there was significant overlap—for example if Marx’s formulation that “the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” was taken literally—we would be unable to explain a phenomenon like relative autonomy except in extreme cases such

¹¹⁴ Ralph Miliband, “The Capitalist State: Reply to Nicos Poulantzas,” *New Left Review* 1/59 (Jan.-Feb. 1970): 55.

as fascism. For more “normal” instances, Miliband had simply adopted an analytic view that converged with state monopoly capitalism, with all its reformist and revisionist political implications.

The inattention to method thus left Miliband incapable of seeing how the capitalist mode of production necessitated the state to act independently of the ruling class. State autonomy was *structurally* determined, since the state was required to retain its autonomy from the economic and ideological levels in order to effectively help the process of social reproduction. A unitary and cohesive branch of the state apparatus such as the bureaucracy was the ‘servant’ of the ruling class not due to its members’ class origins or personal relations, but “by reason of the fact that its internal unity derives from its actualization of the objective role of the state.”¹¹⁵ Therefore, Poulantzas’ critique emphasized that the capitalist state in its numerous forms (liberal, interventionist, Bonapartist, military dictatorship or fascist) was an institutional assemblage whose relative autonomy was structurally built into its internal unity, taking a different character during the various stages in the relations of production and the peculiarities of the class struggle in a given social formation and time.

Like Poulantzas, Miliband believed that the state required a degree of autonomy in order to act in the long-term interests of the dominant class, and he in fact suggested that Marx’s statement on the state as the manager of the common affairs of the bourgeoisie already implied the idea of relative autonomy.¹¹⁶ However, he was highly critical of Poulantzas’ account of relative autonomy, mainly due to what he saw as its structural determinism (indeed it appears

¹¹⁵ Poulantzas, “The Problem of the Capitalist State,” 179.

¹¹⁶ In Miliband’s words: Since the notion of “the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” implied the existence of their particular affairs and interests, and that the notion of the whole bourgeoisie implied the existence of particular fractions, “the state cannot meet this need without enjoying a certain degree of autonomy. In other words, the notion of autonomy is embedded in the definition itself, is an intrinsic part of it” (“Poulantzas and the Capitalist State,” *New Left Review* 1/82 (Nov.-Dec. 1973): 85).

Miliband was incapable of grasping the way in which autonomy could be a structural component) and ahistorical abstraction. Rather than attempting to demonstrate relative autonomy through the study of concrete examples, Poulantzas' exclusive focus on objective relations simply predetermined the actions of the state within the structural constraints of a larger system. Miliband saw Poulantzas as suggesting that "what the state does is in every particular and at all times *wholly* determined by these 'objective relations': in other words, that the structural constraints of the system are so absolutely compelling as to turn those who run the state into the merest functionaries and executants of policies imposed upon them by 'the system.'"¹¹⁷ If on the opposite side of the spectrum the state did the personal bidding of the ruling class by virtue of class affiliation and overlapping interests, here the state did the bidding of the ruling class impersonally, inherent to the objective relations of the system. As Miliband wrote, "Since the ruling class is a dominant element of the system, we are in effect back at the point of total subordination of the state elite to that class; i.e. the state is not 'manipulated' by the ruling class into doing its bidding: it does so autonomously but totally because of the 'objective relations' imposed upon it by the system."¹¹⁸ This determinism effectively substituted objective relations for the notion of the ruling class but eroded any degree of state autonomy that Poulantzas had hoped to retain.

For Miliband, the problem with Poulantzas' argument was not only that his structuralism prevented him from appreciating the degree to which the state was a tenuous unity prone to fragmentation (an insight Miliband thought was made evident by attentiveness to the empirical evidence).¹¹⁹ It was also because in conceiving of the state as the articulation of class relations on the political level, Poulantzas was making the controversial claim that there was no such thing as

¹¹⁷ Miliband, "The Capitalist State," 57.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Barrow, "The Miliband-Poulantzas Debate," 35.

state power but only power at the level of the struggle between social classes. This move analytically reduced the state's power to an epiphenomenal manifestation of class relations in a way that ironically repeated the same mistakes of the economism of the Second and Third Internationals that Poulantzas criticized. "It is simply not true that by 'state power', we can only mean 'the power of a determinate class,'" wrote Miliband; "For this, inter alia, is to deprive the state of any kind of autonomy at all and to turn it precisely into the merest instrument of a determinate class—indeed all but to conceptualize it out of existence."¹²⁰ Aside from reintroducing a sort of structural determinism, this theoretical move also apparently led Poulantzas to contradict himself by asserting the relative autonomy of the state from the influence of any particular class while claiming that the state was not a repository of power on its own, but the articulation of class power.

In his final response to Miliband, intent on refuting the description of him as a structuralist (a theory he depicted as a form of "bourgeois idealism") Poulantzas suggested that he differed from structuralists precisely in *not* seeing power as originating within institutions, but from class relations. The relative autonomy of the capitalist state stemmed from "the contradictory relations of power between the different social classes," albeit in a form that was never the 'direct' and unmediated transfer of the dominant class's preferences into the political level.¹²¹ While the separation of the political and the economic in the capitalist mode of production enabled the general framework of state autonomy, the precise conjuncture of the class struggle in a given social formation meant that the state acted as a nodal point, being "shot through and constituted with and by" the class contradictions of a social formation and securing

¹²⁰ Miliband, "Poulantzas and the Capitalist State," 87.

¹²¹ Poulantzas, "The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau," 282.

among them an “unstable equilibrium of compromises.”¹²² Only by adopting this perspective, ultimately seeing the state as “the condensate of a relation of power between struggling classes,” could one move beyond the dichotomy posed by instrumentalist conceptions that saw the state as a tool in the hands of a class, and structuralist or institutionalist conceptions that assigned to the state its own specific will and rationality.¹²³

It should be noted that Poulantzas’ closing statement was written after he had further developed his ideas in three other works: *Fascism and Dictatorship* (1970), *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (1974) and *The Crisis of the Dictatorships* (1975). Prior to then, Miliband had pointed out that Poulantzas’ structuralism left him uninterested in the task of analyzing the particular historical forms that the capitalist state could take, which resulted in him claiming Bonapartism to be characteristic of all forms of the capitalist state. Indeed, Poulantzas saw Marx’s analysis of Bonapartism as showcasing that “the capitalist State best serves the interests of the capitalist class only when the members of this class do not participate directly in the State apparatus, that is to say when the *ruling class* is not the *politically governing class*” and for this reason the phenomenon of Bonapartism received particular attention in *Political Power and Social Classes*.¹²⁴ However, Miliband saw this generalization of Bonapartism as a “constitutive theoretical characteristic of the very type of capitalist state” resting on a questionable and selective reading of Marx and Engels’ writings, leading to an exceptional circumstance accepted by the dominant class to maintain the existing social order being

¹²² Poulantzas, “The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau,” 283, 280.

¹²³ Poulantzas, “The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau,” 283.

¹²⁴ Poulantzas, “The Problem of the Capitalist State,” 179.

mischaracterized as a “normal” state of affairs in which the state gained autonomy from society.¹²⁵

For Miliband, much as the Bonapartist regime positioned itself above the post-1848 class impasse, so did fascist regimes, “while working to safeguard the capitalist order, whatever their rhetoric and ‘revolutionary’ reforms, were also extremely well placed to determine, *on their own*, how they would do so, and to take decisions of crucial national importance quite independently.”¹²⁶ Yet to a greater degree than in Bonapartism, in exchange for the continued maintenance of their privilege, the capitalist classes had to accept dictatorial party rule and “an extremely high element of unpredictability” in the process of decision-making—a drastic change from the stable rule of law characteristic of liberal democratic regimes and the most extreme case of state autonomy in the capitalist context.¹²⁷ But whereas Poulantzas saw Miliband as being unable to account for any instance of state autonomy beyond this most radical example, Miliband in contrast came to think that Poulantzas’ misreading of Bonapartism and his structuralist indifference to regime types led him to erode the difference between fascist and bourgeois democratic states. As he wrote, “If the state elite is as totally imprisoned in objective structures as is suggested, it follows that there is *really* no difference between a state ruled, say, by bourgeois constitutionalists, whether conservative or social-democrat, and one ruled by, say, Fascists.”¹²⁸ In doing so, it (mistakenly) appeared to Miliband that Poulantzas was repeating the mistakes of the German Communists—a topic Poulantzas had already taken up and criticized in *Fascism and Dictatorship*.

¹²⁵ Miliband, “Poulantzas and the Capitalist State,” 90-91. See also Miliband’s discussion of Bonapartism in “Marx and the State,” *Socialist Register* 2 (1965): 278-296—a text that is cited by Poulantzas in *Political Power and Social Classes* (114f22).

¹²⁶ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 94.

¹²⁷ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 93.

¹²⁸ Miliband, “The Capitalist State: Reply to Nicos Poulantzas,” 58.

3. *Ideology and the State*: Both Miliband and Poulantzas agreed that ideology and legitimation were crucial for mediating the class conflicts internal to capitalism. In doing so, they sought to differentiate their works from those classical Marxist accounts, especially in the Leninist tradition, which had emphasized the repressive role of the state while downplaying its ideological role in maintaining the process of social reproduction. However, they disagreed over the extent to which the institutions that reproduced and channeled ideology did so independently of the centralized oversight of the state apparatus, raising the question of where it was proper to draw the boundaries or extent of the state vis-à-vis civil society.

Drawing upon Althusser's conception of the ideological state apparatuses, Poulantzas maintained that ideology is a fundamentally material phenomenon embedded and disseminated from ostensibly private entities such as parties, churches, trade unions, pressure groups, the mass media, schools, and even the family.¹²⁹ Thus, "the system of the state is composed of *several apparatuses or institutions* of which certain have a principally repressive role, in the strong sense, and others a principally ideological role," both of which were simultaneously crucial for reproducing the social formation.¹³⁰ In addition, these state ideological apparatuses had a greater degree of autonomy in relation to each other than the repressive apparatuses, whose unity was necessary for the state's existence. While Miliband had correctly noted the importance of the process of legitimation for political domination, he confined the existence of legitimating institutions largely to the broader political system external to the state, bringing him closer to the functionalist analyses of Easton and Almond, who similarly spoke of the political system but substituted the Weberian notion of values for the Marxist notion of ideology.¹³¹

¹²⁹ See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127-186.

¹³⁰ Poulantzas, "The Capitalist State," 183.

¹³¹ Poulantzas, "The Problem of the Capitalist State," 183.

According to Poulantzas, this theoretical move underemphasized the extent to which these were *state* institutions rather than private ones. Since a Marxist account of ideology had to avoid the “merely juridical” distinction between public and private that was characteristic of bourgeois social theory, these institutions could rightly be characterized as components of a given capitalist state. There were four primary reasons for why this was so: they fulfilled the state’s role in maintaining the cohesion of the social formation and reproducing the relations of production; they were defended and sanctioned by the state repressive apparatus; and they were affected by the modifications in the form of the state, such as in instances of regime transitions from liberal democracies to dictatorships. Lastly, it was not sufficient for a revolutionary movement to destroy the repressive parts of the state while leaving intact its ideological apparatuses; the latter also needed to be radically changed, so that “the ‘destruction’ of the ideological apparatuses has *its precondition* in the ‘destruction’ of the state repressive apparatus which maintains it.”¹³²

Although he did not spend as much time refuting this argument as the previous points, Miliband noted that Poulantzas’ formulation led him to conflate state and civil society (or the political system), and was another sign of his indifference to the substantive distinction between the bourgeois-democratic and authoritarian variations of the capitalist state. While Miliband also held that ideological hegemony originated from within the social and cultural institutions under the influence of the dominant classes, he argued that “the ‘engineering of consent’ in capitalist society is still largely an unofficial private enterprise.”¹³³ Poulantzas’ framework thus could not capture phenomena peculiar to the bourgeois-democratic state and its distribution of power in relation to civil society, for example the manner in which private organizations such as political

¹³² Poulantzas, “The Problem of the Capitalist State,” 185.

¹³³ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 183.

parties played an important role in organizing and channeling class interests in relation to the state. Poulantzas' unwillingness to demarcate the institutional boundaries of the capitalist state's power thus made impossible any "truly realistic consideration of the dialectical relationship between the state and the 'system,'" since this account subjected all to the "objective relations" within which the state was embedded.¹³⁴

In addition, Miliband suggested that merely subsuming the private ideological institutions under the overarching concept of the capitalist state would hinder understanding of how the state functioned *in* the broader context of capitalist society. For one, ideological institutions had a much greater degree of autonomy in capitalist systems compared to authoritarian ones, making it all the more important to explain how their ideological functions performed *outside* the state system contributed to its political legitimacy. Furthermore, calling them state apparatuses obscured the degree to which the interconnection between the state and society in the capitalist states of the postwar West was changing and intensifying. As Miliband initially argued in *The State in Capitalist Society*, the liberal state was "increasingly involved in the process of 'political socialization,'" intervening in ideological competition.¹³⁵ But despite this intensification of the relationship between public and private systems of power and legitimation taking place in liberal-democratic regimes, he was careful to suggest it had not yet developed into the "state monopolistic system of power" found in their authoritarian counterparts.¹³⁶ Therefore, in assuming that this change had in fact already taken place, Poulantzas' tendency toward formalism and abstraction lost the important elements of empirical and historical specification necessary for a Marxist account of politics.

¹³⁴ Miliband, "The Capitalist State: Reply to Poulantzas," 57.

¹³⁵ Miliband, "The Capitalist State: Reply to Poulantzas," 59; Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 183.

¹³⁶ Miliband, "The Capitalist State: Reply to Nicos Poulantzas," 59.

As this part of the debate shows, the puzzle was to theorize the limits of the state and its effects, and whether the state's intervention on behalf of the capitalist social order required an expansion of its own scope or could be delegated to juridically private entities. This disagreement over ideological institutions pointed to a more fundamental and unresolved question about demarcating the boundaries of the capitalist state. Neither Poulantzas' conception of the state as the effect of class struggle on the political level nor Miliband's distinction of the state from the political system successfully answered the question of how the state ought to be theorized as an entity embedded within society, yet inherently distinct from it. In both authors' explanations, the boundary between the state and civil society, or more broadly between the public and the private spheres, showed to be quite permeable; yet without this tension between the two spheres, a Marxist framework risked missing the state's distinctive presentation of itself as a public power. The question of ideology compounded the problem, since the state's role in reproducing the ideological consensus necessary for capitalist society also lent it a functional character seemingly at odds with the Marxist principles of class struggle, and thus a transformation of the system. Therefore, attempts to nuance the view of the state from a focus on its repressive capacity also ended up highlighting the ideological obstacles facing the working class in the advanced industrialized states, and indeed, raised deeper ontological questions about the state as a whole.

Revisiting the debate, we can see that while Miliband and Poulantzas were equally concerned with theoretically pinning down the capitalist state, their distinct epistemological points of view (exacerbated over the course of their exchanges) prevented them from finding common ground on questions of relative autonomy, the ideological institutions, and the impact of class conflict on state power. Unintentionally, the debate revealed the malleability of "the

capitalist state” as a concept of Marxist analysis, and the degree to which the concrete properties attributed to it depended ahead of time on the theoretical framework brought to bear on the question. Yet while Miliband and Poulantzas’ epistemological frameworks prevented them from effectively articulating a compatible theory of the capitalist state, it should also be noted there was evidence of overlap suggesting a degree of convergence on some key issues concerning the relationship between class and the state—a convergence that would become more evident in their later works.¹³⁷

As we saw, both authors were in agreement that existing attempts to theorize the state from a Marxist perspective were drastically insufficient due to the inability of the state monopoly capitalist theories to account for the *sui generis* nature of the state as a political power. For this reason, both had a broadly overlapping agreement on the necessity of the capitalist state to exercise a degree of autonomy in order to regularly intervene into the class struggle with the purpose of perpetuating the rule of the dominant bourgeois class. Poulantzas, of course, dedicated the major portion of *Political Power and Social Classes* to demonstrating this role of the state as the factor of cohesion within a social formation. However, it would be wrong to suggest that Miliband was uninterested in the abilities of the state to successfully implement the *long-term* interests of the capitalist class—a position that goes against his portrayal as an instrumentalist.¹³⁸ As he wrote in *The State in Capitalist Society*, the capitalist state helped “mitigate the form and content of class domination in many areas of civil society,” in presenting itself as a neutral and unbiased power standing above society.¹³⁹ The implication of this claim

¹³⁷ Isaac, *Power and Marxist Theory*, 150-162.

¹³⁸ In addition, toward the end of *The State in Capitalist Society*, Miliband observed that the “capitalist context of generalized inequality in which the state operates basically determines its policies and actions” (265). Such a remark provides additional evidence that Miliband’s analysis was not incompatible with structural explanations, although he did not fully emphasize this dimension until *Marxism and Politics*.

¹³⁹ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 266.

was that the state's institutional system was a complex arrangement, in which factors like political parties and the separation of powers prevented the state from merely being seized by Left forces and put to their own aims.

Elsewhere in *The State in Capitalist Society*, one can find passages in which Miliband takes a stance that closely resembling those of Poulantzas, for example in his suggestion that a key role of political parties was to fuse and articulate the different interests of the dominant classes: "Precisely because the latter are not solid, congealed economic and social blocs, they require political formations which reconcile, coordinate and fuse their interests, and which express their common purposes as well as their separate interests."¹⁴⁰ As the mediators between the state system and the political system, parties played an especially important role in Miliband's account for the formation of a common hegemonic project from among parts of dominant class, which despite its ideological and self-interested affinities may still have had difficulty forming into a unified political whole. And although Poulantzas in his review emphasized the structural unity of the state as an objective system operating according to its own logic, his second contribution to the debate over six years later reflected his changing theoretical position, where he now maintained that the state, "destined to reproduce class divisions cannot really be a monolithic, fissureless bloc, but is itself, by virtue of its very structure (the state is a relation) divided."¹⁴¹

The reason why Miliband, and eventually Poulantzas, devoted special attention to these internal contradictions of the capitalist state cannot be isolated from the political agendas guiding their research. Studying the capitalist state in the postwar context meant applying the insights of Marxist theory to lay bare the fragmentation of the state apparatus, and showing how the diffuse

¹⁴⁰ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 187.

¹⁴¹ Poulantzas, "The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau," 284.

character of the capitalist state also made the prospects of socialism in the advanced industrialized countries an ongoing, contingent, and contested political struggle.¹⁴² Both were motivated by explicit normative commitments to understand the workings of the capitalist state so as to provide a guiding theory for a left politics and a democratic transition to socialism. For this reason, on one hand, this meant critically analyzing the way that the state concealed the internal contradictions of capitalism and reproduced existing social relations. On the other, it meant pinpointing the conditions under which those same capitalist states could provide institutional pathways for radical political movements to form and proliferate.

Although the Miliband-Poulantzas debate did not lead to the emergence of a common research program, it soon became a prism through which some of the key theoretical positions about a Marxist theory of the state were staked out and disseminated into a variety of competing perspectives. The historical period during which it took place was a time of great intellectual and political uncertainty that the Left had not experienced on a global level since the interwar years, which saw regime change in parts of the semi-periphery, including Southern Europe and Latin America; the intensification of the contradictions of the postwar economic order in the advanced industrialized democracies; and a domestic radicalization embodied in the New Left in response to the conservative and militaristic policies of these regimes at home and abroad. During this time, as Perry Anderson has suggested, “the problems involved in developing a political theory capable of grasping and analyzing the nature and mechanisms of representative democracy, as a mature form of bourgeois power, were scarcely less than those posed by the rapid advance of the world capitalist economy, in the first two decades after the war.”¹⁴³ The main goal of both thinkers can therefore be understood as formulating a critique that could meet these challenges,

¹⁴² Barrow, “Ralph Miliband and the Instrumentalist Theory of the State,” 93.

¹⁴³ Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, 48.

and in particular the inability of capitalist democracies to live up to their ideals, as captured in the form of the consensus-oriented pluralism advocated by defenders of the status quo. By exemplifying the theoretical openness of Marxism at a time in which orthodox Communist theories of the state, and precepts of Marxism more broadly, were being called into question, the Miliband-Poulantzas debate in retrospect took on a greater historical significance than appears in its immediate context.

V. Bringing Marxism into Political Science

By the middle of the 1970s, both Miliband's and Poulantzas' positions notably evolved from the ones adopted during their debate in the *New Left Review*, yet without leading to an intellectual reconciliation. In retrospect *The State in Capitalist Society* and *Political Power and Social Classes* remain two distinct methodological and theoretical approaches to the state; while their authors' intellectual exchanges staked out their positions in as sharp of a manner as possible, in the process obscuring what common thematic ground they shared.¹⁴⁴ However, the debate also created an opening for the introduction of Poulantzas' work to an Anglo-American audience, which in turn, prompted the spread of interest in Marxist theorizations of the state, and their growing theoretical sophistication as responses to the perceived "instrumentalism" of Miliband's approach.

In the United States during the late 1960s, scholarly investigations into the relationship between the capitalist class and political power were far less concerned with developing a theory of the capitalist state than with examining the networks of possible influence and special interests that undermined the workings of liberal democracy. Influenced heavily by Mills, books like G. William Domhoff's *Who Rules America?* and *The Higher Circles* were representative of this

¹⁴⁴ See Barrow, "The Miliband-Poulantzas Debate: An Intellectual History."

strand of “corporate-liberal theory” or “power structure research,” which suggested that the American upper class “contributes a disproportionate number of its members to the controlling institutions and key decision-making groups of the country.”¹⁴⁵ For Domhoff, the upper class was the governing or ruling class highly represented in state institutions (especially the executive branch), major banks and corporations, universities and think tanks, and the mass media. As Domhoff noted in retrospect, his focus in the 1960s on examining whether there was such a thing as a power elite or a governing class operated on the assumption that “government” was a clear and uncontested concept, and was written at a time when “there was hardly a Marxist in sight, and no one talked about ‘the state.’”¹⁴⁶

What then prompted the fairly rapid shift away from this model of research and toward neo-Marxism? The most plausible answer is that the Miliband-Poulantzas debate became the key point of theoretical reference for the possible directions that research on the state could take, which in turn, enabled a growing theoretical radicalization, leading away from accounts that retained any semblance of a liberal-positivist problematic. The initial reception of Marxist state theory into the American context therefore must be seen as encouraged by the Miliband-Poulantzas debate, which enabled a growing pluralization and incorporation of alternative Marxist approaches to the state.

Even before the transposition of the Miliband-Poulantzas debate into the American social scientific context, both authors were already steeped in dialogue with a body of mainstream scholarship on power and the state in American political science and sociology.¹⁴⁷ For example,

¹⁴⁵ G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America?* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967), 5. See also Domhoff, *The Higher Circles: The Governing Class in America* (New York: Random House, 1971).

¹⁴⁶ Domhoff, “Corporate-Liberal Theory and the Social Security Act,” 318. See also John Mollenkopf, “Theories of the State and Power Structure Research,” *The Insurgent Sociologist* 5 (1975): 245-264.

¹⁴⁷ See Isaac, *Power and Marxist Theory* for a fuller account from the standpoint of the philosophy of social science.

in addition to his engagement with the pluralist accounts of Almond and Dahl, Miliband had also drawn on works such as E. E. Schattschneider's *The Semi-Sovereign People* and V. O. Key's *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups* for additional support to his claim about the inherent bias of state institutions toward the interests of capital rather than labor.¹⁴⁸ Poulantzas was also well informed of the contemporary debates surrounding pluralism and structural-functionalism in the social sciences. *Political Power and Social Classes* was peppered with citations of figures like Easton, Almond, David Apter, and Karl Deutsch, whose accounts were said to treat the political system as "the simple principle of the social totality," thereby diffusing its specific *political* aspect rather than concentrating it in the state. In addition, Poulantzas also critiqued works like Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba's *The Civic Culture*, and Easton's *Framework of Political Analysis* and *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*, arguing that their associating the political system with "the authoritarian distribution of values" was ultimately part of the "process of legitimization" by which a social system was reproduced.¹⁴⁹

However, it was Poulantzas' analysis of the power elite approach identified with Mills that was most influential for the development of the neo-Marxist perspective. As mentioned above, his critique of Miliband's language of the "ruling elite" identified it as part of a bourgeois social scientific problematic that operated with a voluntaristic conception of power, saw institutions and organizations (rather than classes) as repositories of power in their own right, and sought to demonstrate the mere existence of elite networks rather than inquiring into their underlying causes. Yet in fact, as Barrow has shown, Poulantzas initially developed this account *not* through a reading of *The State in Capitalist Society*, which had not yet been published at the time when he wrote his book, but instead by identifying Miliband's position with that of Mills.

¹⁴⁸ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 164, 167.

¹⁴⁹ Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 222.

Therefore, while the real target of Poulantzas' critique of instrumentalism had been Mills' theory of the power elite, in his debate with Miliband he overlooked how *The State in Capitalist Society* had already moved beyond Mills both empirically and conceptually.¹⁵⁰

In the wake of Poulantzas' critique, the "instrumentalism" attributed to Domhoff, Miliband, and Paul Sweezy, which suggested the state serves the interests of the bourgeoisie insofar as individuals of a similar class background, ideology, connections, and interests populated its institutions, was constructed by a new wave of neo-Marxist critics as a position that, due to its theoretical underdevelopment, allowed for an indiscriminate borrowing of concepts and arguments from Mills and neo-Weberian sociology. For example, according to one account, *The State in Capitalist Society* was too indebted to ruling elite theory to accurately explain the dialectical struggle of capital and labor in capitalist societies.¹⁵¹ Critics of instrumentalism also attacked the idea that the state could be reduced to an aggregate of various institutions directly under the command of the ruling class (although neither Miliband nor Domhoff actually maintained that this relationship was a constant necessity).¹⁵² In addition, the focus on the specific personnel of the state apparatus was said to lead instrumentalists to over-emphasize the strategies and actions of key individuals and groups, leaving them incapable of accounting for historical structural trends and value-laden phenomena as legitimacy, culture, and ideology.¹⁵³

In effect, the emergence of the instrumentalist label that subsequent neo-Marxist scholarship sought to distance itself from was a theoretical construct premised on Poulantzas' questionable association of Miliband with Mills. Ironically, this shift had been occurring at the same time as Miliband's work was gaining growing audience in the United States. By the middle

¹⁵⁰ See Barrow, "Plain Marxists, Sophisticated Marxists, and C. Wright Mills' 'The Power Elite'," 425; and Barrow, "Ralph Miliband and the Instrumentalist Theory of the State."

¹⁵¹ Balbus, "Ruling Elite Theory vs. Marxist Class Analysis," 45.

¹⁵² See Carnoy, *The State and Political Theory*, 211-214.

¹⁵³ Das, "State Theories," 28-31; and Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State*, 13-50.

of the 1970s, the APSA had Miliband listed as among the most-cited political scientists in the profession, and from 1970 to 1973 he served on the advisory board of *Politics & Society*, one of the preferred outlets for critical scholarship in American political science and sociology.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, in a 1970 review of *The State in Capitalist Society* in the *American Political Science Review*, Benjamin Barber noted that the book did *not* conjure up a “monopolistic ruling elite in direct control of the state,” as Miliband’s critics came to assume.¹⁵⁵ And while Barber questioned the appropriateness of Marxist categories for describing the socio-economic conditions of the United States, he concluded that “the Marxist perspective comes far closer to capturing the relevant realities of the Western system of power than the sublimely complacent fixations of the pluralists.” The significance of an admission such as this in the pages of the leading journal in the discipline should not be understated.

In contrast, the reception of Poulantzas in the American context was comparatively slower. While his initial review of Miliband appeared in late 1969, *Political Power and Social Classes* was not translated into English until 1973, by which point Poulantzas had already begun to reevaluate this earlier stance. Upon its translation, the book was soon recognized as “a classic within Marxist theory of the state,” including within the Anglophone social sciences.¹⁵⁶ Another reviewer writing for the *Journal of Politics* called it a “far superior” work to *The State in Capitalist Society*, “deserving of a broad public among American social scientists,” that “bridges Marxist and ‘Western’ social science writings with remarkable acuity.”¹⁵⁷ At the same time, some critics repeated Miliband’s objections, suggesting that the book was excessively theoretical

¹⁵⁴ Newman, *Ralph Miliband the Politics of the New Left*, 185; Katznelson, *Politics & Society Reader*, 2.

¹⁵⁵ Benjamin Barber, “Review of *The State in Capitalist Society*” *American Political Science Review* 64 (1970): 928-929.

¹⁵⁶ Book Notes, “Review of Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*,” *Journal of Peace Research* 12 (1975): 91.

¹⁵⁷ Ronald Tiersky, “Review of *Political Power and Social Classes*,” *The Journal of Politics* 38 (1976): 186-188

and unconcerned with empirical and historical evidence.¹⁵⁸ In a 1974 review in *Politics & Society*, representing one of the earliest English-language treatments of Poulantzas aside from Miliband's, Amy Bridges raised concerns about the book's ahistorical and functionalist character, its tendency to downplay the economic dimension of the state's activities, and the dismissal of the historical agency of individuals by recourse to the ideological interpellation of subjects. Although she noted that Poulantzas moved away from the base-superstructure model of previous Marxist accounts, he had neglected how "the state is an arena of class struggle...contradicted by its own democratic organization," especially with the growing interrelation of state and economy.¹⁵⁹

The introduction of Poulantzas and his critique of Miliband into the Anglo-American context in the early 1970s altered the scope and focus, and thus the trajectory, of critical scholarship on the state and political power. Following the gradual reception and integration of his arguments, by the mid-1970s instrumentalism was largely discredited due to its proximity to the earlier debate between pluralism and elite theory, mostly becoming a foil for more "authentic" or theoretically-nuanced forms of neo-Marxism.¹⁶⁰ In fact, as one influential overview of this literature from the *Kapitalistate* collective observed, by 1975 "much of the recent work on the state has taken the form of a polemic against one or another alternative perspective."¹⁶¹ One of

¹⁵⁸ Lionel S. Lewis, "Review of *Political Power and Social Classes*," *Contemporary Sociology* 5 (1976): 338-340

¹⁵⁹ Bridges, "Nicos Poulantzas and the Marxist Theory of the State," 188.

¹⁶⁰ Apart from Poulantzas' polemic against Miliband, the critique of instrumentalism has also been attributed to James O'Connor's *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1973). O'Connor, who was one of the founders of the *Kapitalistate* group, suggested that the corporate-liberal view promoted by Domhoff was inadequate for capturing the relationship between big business and the executive branch; monopoly capitalist interests were not the aggregate interests of a particular class but were structural, emerging "unintentionally" through mediation by an independent executive. See Domhoff, "Corporate Liberal Theory and the Social Security Act."

¹⁶¹ David A. Gold, Y.H. Lo and Erik Olin Wright, "Recent Developments in Marxist Theories of the Capitalist State, Parts I and II," *Monthly Review* 27 (1975): 30.

the lasting consequences of the Miliband-Poulantzas debate was therefore the polarization of their respective positions into the opposing categories of “instrumentalism” and “structuralism,” even though neither they nor subsequent interlocutors in this literature referred to themselves by these labels. In his final response to Miliband and Laclau, Poulantzas had rejected Bridges’ characterization of himself as structuralist, as well as the “academic and ideologico-political conjuncture in the United States” that sought to pose this false dilemma as the means of reconciling the two poles.¹⁶² Nevertheless, the labels persisted, and given the unviability of the instrumentalist position and Poulantzas’ auto-critique of *Political Power and Social Classes* (as well as his rejection of the structuralist label), by the middle of the 1970s it had become apparent that there was a deadlock between the instrumentalist and structuralist positions as set out in the original debate.

As the surveys of the literature from that time attest, a variety of alternative positions seeking to move beyond this dichotomy were proposed and debated in outlets such as *Politics & Society* and *Kapitalistate*. Consider some examples. For Gold, Lo, and Wright the principal tendencies were instrumentalism (Miliband, Sweezy, Domhoff), structuralism (Poulantzas, the German derivationists, and Paul Baran and Sweezy’s *Monopoly Capital*), and Hegelian-Marxism (the Frankfurt School, Gramsci), in addition to the contributions by Claus Offe, James O’Connor, and Alan Wolfe that sought to overcome the weaknesses of these positions. Rejecting these typologies in the early 1980s, Jessop had split the literature into a different triad: state monopoly capitalism; the “capital logic” or German derivationist school; and the neo-Gramscian school that found its most sophisticated expression in the writings of Poulantzas.¹⁶³ At around the same time,

¹⁶² Poulantzas, “The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau,” 76.

¹⁶³ Jessop, *The Capitalist State*, especially Ch. 5. Jessop also suggests at least four other possible approaches—instrumentalism, neo-Ricardianism, Italian Marxism sans Gramsci, and the mainly

Martin Carnoy proposed a more thematic division between the study of the relation of the capitalist class to the state (Domhoff, Adam Przeworski, Fred Block and Theda Skocpol); the relation between the logic of capital and state policies (O'Connor, Wolfe); and the relationship between class struggle and the state (Manuel Castells, Erik Olin Wright, and Samuel Bowles and Hebert Gintis).¹⁶⁴ By the early 1990s, now in retrospect, Barrow suggested that the typology of the critical theories of the state could be divided into instrumentalism or “plain Marxism” (Domhoff, Miliband), neo-Marxist structuralism (Poulantzas), the derivationist school (Elmar Altvater, Joachim Hirsch), the systems-analytic approach (Claus Offe, Jürgen Habermas, Andre Gorz), and organizational realism (Fred Block, Theda Skocpol).¹⁶⁵

The range of these positions makes it impossible to extensively treat them here, nor is it especially necessary to adjudicate which typology was most accurate.¹⁶⁶ It suffices to note that they illustrate the diversity of the theoretical attempts to go beyond the scope of the Miliband-Poulantzas debate, and the manner in which the original absence of a coherent theory of the state in Marx's writings required a creative filling in of the gaps. On one hand, these accounts shared some overlapping similarities, such as an understanding of the state as a “nodal point in the network of power relations” characteristic of capitalist society that played a crucial role in the reproduction of capitalist social relations.¹⁶⁷ Aside from a unanimous rejection of the liberal-

instrumentalist American contributions—that he excludes from consideration based on either a lack of sophistication or of space (Preface, xiv-xvi).

¹⁶⁴ Carnoy, *Political Theory and the State*, 209-11.

¹⁶⁵ Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State*.

¹⁶⁶ In addition to the above surveys, see Colin Crouch (ed.), *State and Economy in Contemporary Capitalism* (New York: St. Martin's, 1979), pp. 13-55; Clarke, *The State Debate*; Patrick Dunleavy and Brendan O'Leary, *Theories of the State: The Politics of Liberal Democracy* (New York: Meredith Press, 1987); Dryzek and Dunleavy, *Theories of the Democratic State*, p. 79-100; and Ernesto Laclau, “Teorias Marxistas del Estado,” in Norbert Lechner, (ed.) *Estado y politica en America Latina* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1981), pp. 25-59.

¹⁶⁷ Colin Hay, “(What's Marxist about) Marxist State Theory?” in *The State: Theories and Issues*, eds. Colin Hay, Michael Lister, and David Marsh (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 63.

pluralist position that the state was a neutral arbiter between autonomous interest groups, there was also a broad consensus on the idea that the state was not a unitary subject with its own will, but a contingent and fragmented entity affected by the dynamics of the class struggle and a variety of contradictory social and economic processes. In addition, most of these accounts were concerned with specifying the degree to which the state could retain some degree of autonomy from the immediate preferences of the ruling class in order to effectively reproduce the current class structure.

Taken as a whole, therefore, Marxist accounts of the state concentrated on why and how it could act as the locus of capitalist class power. On the other hand, the framing of this question and the suggested answers were influenced by a wide range of theoretical positions that were often irreconcilable, and which drew upon different textual and empirical evidence. In some cases, this meant highlighting the capitalist state's economic functions. This was the shared concern of the otherwise different accounts provided by Claus Offe, James O'Connor, and the German derivationist school, all of whom concentrated on the state's ability to reproduce the political and economic systems of the capitalist mode of production, to act as a mediating mechanism in the long-term collective interest of the fragmented ruling class, and on how the contradictions between private accumulation and public legitimacy could reproduce its systemic crisis.¹⁶⁸ From a diametrically opposite perspective, accounts such as Alan Wolfe's and Bertell Ollman's (both prominent figures in the Caucus) focused on theorizing the liberal state through the lens of legitimacy and alienation. For Wolfe, "distinguishing between the concept of a state and its phenomenal representation in government...is the only way of coming to terms with the

¹⁶⁸ See Claus Offe, "Structural Problems of the Capitalist State: Class Rule and the Political System. On the Selectiveness of Political Institutions" in *German Political Studies* Vol. I, edited by Klaus von Beyme (Sage, 1974): 31-54; and Offe, *Contradictions of the Welfare State* (Hutchinson, 1984); O'Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State*; and Holloway and Picciotto, eds. *State and Capital*. See also Das, "State Theories: A Critical Analysis," 31-39.

confusion of politics in capitalist society,” and critical political science needed to “go beyond the state to a critique of all alienated politics.”¹⁶⁹ For Ollman too, the state was “an abstraction in political life on the same plane that value is in economic life,” and the various theorizations of the state within the Marxist camp were not contradictory but a set of partial observations of a single, multifaceted and evasive social relation.¹⁷⁰

In addition to the methodological and textual differences, these studies were also affected by the peculiarities of the national contexts (West German, Italian, French, British, American) in which they were developed. In the case of the United States, according to Carnoy, this scholarship was framed by “the absence of traditional ‘class’ struggle at the center of the empire,” as well as “heavily influenced by the intellectual hegemony of American social science empiricism;” thus forcing them into dialogue with dominant paradigms such as neoclassical economic theory, Parsonian social theory, and empiricist-pluralist political theory.¹⁷¹ Similarly, Jessop at the time raised the question of how “the absence of a well-developed ‘state tradition’” and the “corresponding dominance of liberal, pluralist conceptions of government” in both Britain and the United States contributed to the weakness of Marxist state theory in those countries.¹⁷² More specifically, in the early 1980s one could still observe that most Marxist studies of politics in America were either by foreign scholars (Andre Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, Claus Offe, Miliband, Poulantzas) or by American Marxists from the other social sciences, most

¹⁶⁹ Alan Wolfe, “New Directions in the Marxist Theory of Politics,” *Politics & Society* 4 (1974): 149-150. See also Wolfe, *The Limits of Legitimacy: Political Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism* (New York: Free Press, 1977).

¹⁷⁰ Bertell Ollman, “State as a Value Relation,” *Kapitalistate* 2 (1973): 53-59; Bertell Ollman, “Theses on the Capitalist State,” *Monthly Review* 34 (1982): 41-46; see also Ollman, “Marxism and Political Science: Prolegomenon to a Debate on Marx’s Method.”

¹⁷¹ Carnoy, *Political Theory and the State*, 256.

¹⁷² Bob Jessop, *The Capitalist State*, xvi.

prominently sociology (Erik Olin Wright, James O'Connor, and Immanuel Wallerstein).¹⁷³ Within this context, only the aforementioned Bay Area journal *Kapitalistate* had been operating with the explicit mission of promoting a cross-national discussion of Marxist theory that tied the American state debate to those in the other industrialized advanced democracies like England, France, Italy, West Germany, and Japan.

However, while the development and reception of these approaches through the early 1980s was uneven, it did garner attention from leading figures in the political science discipline. David Easton, who perhaps more than any other of his pluralist contemporaries had been conciliatory to the “postbehavioral” phase that the discipline was entering, observed in 1985 that “Marxism, after lying dormant in American social science since the 1940s (even though very much alive in Europe), was reintroduced during the 1970s,” bringing to political science “a renewed awareness of the importance of history and of the significance of the economy, social classes, and ideology as well as of the total social context (the social formation, as Althusser would phrase it).”¹⁷⁴ That is not to say that Easton was convinced of the corresponding revival of the state that this Marxist literature advanced. In an extended critique of Poulantzas, Easton called him “the only Marxist who has ever sought to elaborate a general theory of politics with distinct empirical relevance.”¹⁷⁵ At the same time, he claimed that Poulantzas’ theory, which vacillated between treating the state as an institutionalized political power or as a relationship or condensation of social forces, resulted in an unproductive regression to a vague concept. In both cases Easton suggested that Poulantzas was either led to a quasi-metaphysical conception of the State or to admit that older notions such as the political system remained superior tools of

¹⁷³ Kesselman, “The State and Class Struggle: Trends in Marxist Political Science,” 82.

¹⁷⁴ David Easton, “Political Science in the United States: Past and Present,” *International Political Science Review* 6 (1985): 133-152.

¹⁷⁵ David Easton, “The Political System Besieged by the State,” *Political Theory* 9 (1981): 303-325.

explanation. Since the state was secondary in importance within the Marxist framework to other concepts such as the mode of production, class struggle, and ‘contradictions’, Easton maintained that “Marxism without the state as a concept could remain Marxism and would be at least the clearer for it.”¹⁷⁶

In addition, Easton noted that the encounter between European Marxist theory with professional political science since the 1970s had led to its dilution. As he wrote, “in being absorbed into American social research the various schools of Marxism have been attenuated; most inquiry is only quasi-Marxist in character.”¹⁷⁷ By the early 1980s doubts began to emerge from within the Marxist camp about the impasse that the state debate had reached. For longstanding critics such as Domhoff the entire enterprise represented little more than “a dispute among Marxists concerning who was the most Marxist and whose theories were the most politically useful.”¹⁷⁸ Yet even figures that contributed to the debate moving forward such as Claus Offe could not help but express doubt about the feasibility of the task, writing that “theory production by Marxists is clearly so diversified and internally divided on substantive as well as methodological issues that there appears to be rather a plurality of sharply conflicting approaches and doctrines” instead of a Marxist theory of the state.¹⁷⁹ Even more critically, Ira Katznelson suggested at the time that current Marxist theories, and in particular those of Miliband, Poulantzas, and the capital logic school, to their detriment paid scant attention to Weberian readings of the state, thereby placing “artificial, even crippling, limits on the development of Marxist social thought and on strategic political reasoning.”¹⁸⁰ As late as 1994, Frances Fox

¹⁷⁶ Easton, “Political System Besieged by the State,” 321.

¹⁷⁷ Easton, “Political Science in the United States,” 144-145.

¹⁷⁸ Quoted in Barrow, “Plain Marxists, Sophisticated Marxists, and C. Wright Mills’ ‘The Power Elite,” 425.

¹⁷⁹ Claus Offe, “The Capitalist State,” *Political Studies* 31 (1983): 668-672.

¹⁸⁰ Katznelson, “Lenin or Weber? Choices in the Marxist Theories of Politics,” 632.

Piven observed that the popularity of structuralist analyses in the 1970s “lent itself to wondrous excesses of theoretical elaboration, which could entirely avoid the actual empirical muddiness of class politics in postwar capitalist societies.”¹⁸¹

Therefore, as Marxism was being expanded into a more serious interlocutor for the mainstream American social sciences by the early 1980s, it was also affected by the general crisis of radical politics in the advanced industrialized democracies in the decade between 1969 and 1979. For many of the figures discussed above, this raised the need to critically reevaluate and revise the ideas that had been taken for granted for too long among Marxist scholarship. As Poulantzas observed near the end of the decade, the social sciences in the Anglo-Saxon countries, in Western Europe, and in the Communist bloc alike were confronted during this time with the need for more adequate theorization of the capitalist state in light of the growing interconnection between the political and economic spheres and the proliferation of newer forms of political micro-power networks.¹⁸² The boundaries of Marxist political theory thus needed to be pushed beyond the equally unsatisfying confinements of historicism and structuralism within which the debates of the past decade had become bogged down. Marxism, “if it wishes to be creative and not dogmatic...must be both open to the other social sciences and aware of the boundaries which define it as a discipline.”¹⁸³ Although Poulantzas continued to warn about the uncritical incorporation of Anglo-Saxon empiricism and neo-Weberian positivism into the fundamental conceptual system of historical materialism, in his final book, *State, Power, Socialism*, he engaged contemporaries such as Foucault, Deleuze, and the *Annales* School in what became an unfinished attempt to study changing dynamics of the globalized capitalist state, the weakening

¹⁸¹ Frances Fox Piven, “Reflections on Ralph Miliband,” *New Left Review* 1/206 (1994): 24.

¹⁸² Nicos Poulantzas, “Research note on the state and society” *International Social Science Journal* 32 (1980): 600-608.

¹⁸³ Nicos Poulantzas, “Is there a Crisis in Marxism?” In *The Poulantzas Reader*, 383.

of organized labor, the rise of “authoritarian statism,” and the paths that a possible democratic transition to socialism could take.¹⁸⁴

In sum, the Miliband-Poulantzas debate put the problem of the capitalist state on the table, becoming one of the key points of reference for the revived interest in both Marxism and the state within political science and political sociology, and largely framing the trajectory that subsequent discussions of the topic would take. By putting forward a critique of then-predominant Marxist theories of the state, primarily state monopoly capitalism and the Leninist understanding of the state as an instrument in the hands of the ruling class, it initiated a discussion about the state’s relative autonomy that sought to move beyond the “economism” or “instrumentalism” associated with Second International Marxism and contemporary Communist orthodoxy, respectively. The debate thus opened and defined the research parameters over what the necessary elements for a coherent Marxist theory of the state would entail, lending to Marxist state theory the quality of an open ended research agenda that branched off into a variety of sometimes irreconcilable positions over the relatively brief course of a decade.

Yet we have also seen that the debate’s progression and its inconclusive end left open a host of questions that subsequent neo-Marxist literature did not fully resolve. Two issues were particularly important for this scholarship in terms of its analytical and normative purposes, as well as in terms of the influence that it had on political science research. These were the degree of autonomy the state had from the capitalist class, and the state’s role in channeling the political class struggle and acting as the terrain on which it occurred. In the following two chapters, I will discuss the reception of neo-Marxist debates concerning these issues into the political science discipline. In Chapter Three, I will discuss how the neo-Marxist discussion over state autonomy as articulated in the wake of the Miliband-Poulantzas debate was received and transformed by

¹⁸⁴ See Stuart Hall, “Nicos Poulantzas: State Power Socialism,” *New Left Review* 1/119 (1980): 60-69.

the Committee on States and Social Structures into the neo-statist turn within political science. And in Chapter Four, I will discuss how neo-Marxist and Eurocommunist discussions of political strategy with regard to the capitalist state and the transition to socialism anticipated a number of the same themes discussed in the research project of *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*.

Chapter Three: The Committee on States and Social Structures

“The state, a concept that many of us thought had been polished off a quarter of a century ago, has now risen from the grave to haunt us once again.” – David Easton, “The Political System Besieged by the State,” 1981

“Radicals do not see political science as a well designed discipline; its very definition is an obstruction, they will say, to necessary research.” – Charles Lindblom, “Another State of Mind,” 1981

“It is not ‘the state’ in general, but the American polity, in particular, with which we are concerned.” – Ira Katznelson, 1986

I. Another State of Mind

Even at the height of the post-1968 interest in Marxism, political science was not at the forefront of its reception into the American context. In fact, this influx during the 1970s was more prevalent in sociology, where issues surrounding working class formation, the retrenchment of the welfare state, and the future of advanced industrialized societies loomed large for a new generation of scholars.¹ The contributions of historical sociologists like Immanuel Wallerstein, Charles Tilly, Barrington Moore, and later, Theda Skocpol and Michael Mann, were key for the revival of interest in history, material forces, and state power in the analysis of social transformations and the formation of political institutions.² There was a general sense among many scholars that the old paradigms were insufficient for answering the questions that had arisen in the wake of the social unrest of the 1960s. Therefore, an increasingly vocal movement began calling for a return to the study the importance of states for economic development and institutional and social change.

¹ Jeff Manza and Michael A. McCarthy, “The Neo-Marxist Legacy in American Sociology,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 37 (2011): 155-183.

² For a contemporary evaluation of those thinkers’ influence, see Theda Skocpol, ed. *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

By the early 1980s, this push was beginning to have an effect in political science as well. One sign of this change was that the theme of the annual APSA meeting in 1981 was dedicated to “Restoring the State to Political Science.” As explained by program co-chairs Theodore Lowi and Sidney Tarrow, the “stateless” character of the discipline during much of its history was a reflection of the United States’ perception of itself as a stateless society. Lowi and Tarrow argued that the “the state is the one common thread in all subfields within the discipline, either as direct force (as in the study of institutions, executives, and policies) or as an indirect force or ‘brooding omnipresence’ significant only as a general context or even significant—as in the American past—by its absence from political discourse.” Although they were careful to note that they did not reject the importance of studying political behavior or political processes, they maintained that the study of institutions was crucial for this task, and thus sought to encourage “an awareness that the state and the institutions of public control should be brought back in some form or another to the center of political science.”³

With these remarks, the APSA leadership indicated that it again recognized the importance of the state concept to the history of political science and the role that it played for disciplinary self-identity. According to this view, the state was the one general and versatile concept through which one could unify an increasingly diverse and segmented array of research agendas. Thus, even the relative absence of the state from social scientific discourse as during the 1950s-60s, did not negate its effects and “brooding omnipresence” when it came to the study of political phenomena.

An important aspect of the neo-statist revival was its alleged novelty with regard to competing “society-centered” pluralist and neo-Marxist theories. While the intellectual resources

³ Theodore Lowi and Sidney Tarrow, “The 1981 APSA annual meeting program: Some thoughts and suggestions,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 13 (1980): 339-340.

for a critique of pluralism could be found in the works of C. Wright Mills, Theodore Lowi, Grant McConnell, and others, we have already seen how at the time neo-Marxist scholarship appeared at the cutting edge of critical social research. Insofar as neo-Marxist theory posed important theoretical and empirical challenges to conventional arguments about the study of power, the state, and the relationship between capitalism and liberal democracy in the radicalized intellectual context of the post-1968 years, it served as a channel through which a younger generation of scholars could articulate new theories and research frameworks addressing the perceived blind spots of consensus-oriented pluralism and structural-functionalism. At the same time, the identity of the neo-statist research agenda was partially premised on the differences that it drew between itself and neo-Marxist political theory, subjecting it to a series of critiques.⁴ This process of integration and appropriation legitimated (a particular reading of) Marxism as one of a number of possible theoretical frameworks of explaining state-society relations, yet also contributed to the declining prominence of this theory after the 1980s.

The connection between critical social science and the state was highlighted by Charles Lindblom in his 1981 APSA Presidential Address, “Another State of Mind.” Warning that for too long mainstream political science has left itself open to a complacent view of the liberal democratic political process, government, and the state, Lindblom urged adherents of “conventional theory” to take seriously the new radical critiques of recent years.⁵ These radicals had long raised important questions about the relationship between citizens and government, including about political indoctrination, corporatism, the tension between business interests and popular demands, and even the viability and efficacy of democracy—all of which political scientists were only belatedly catching up to. Lindblom recognized that the works of Miliband,

⁴ For example, see Paul Cammack, “Statism, New Institutionalism, and Marxism,” *Socialist Register* 26 (1990): 147-170.

⁵ Charles Lindblom, “Another State of Mind,” *American Political Science Review* 76 (1982): 9-21.

Poulantzas, Habermas, Offe, and O'Connor were more sensitive to the multifaceted processes by which the state could act autonomously in mediating class conflicts. Yet despite the increasing prominence of these theories, Lindblom also noted the disciplinary and institutional obstacles that prevented their acceptance into the mainstream. While American political science was still firmly in the thrall of neo-pluralist institutionalism and democratic theory, radical literature was still disproportionately European and grounded in other disciplines like sociology, history, philosophy, and economics. In addition, its insularity and "excursions into phenomenology, hermeneutics, interpretive theory, and critical theory" also contributed to a gap that prevented the two traditions from fully engaging each other.⁶

Lindblom urged for mainstream political science to draw on the insights of radical and neo-Marxist social science, attempting to bring a set of potentially important scholarship under the pluralistic umbrella of the discipline. Yet this call for dialogue and possible integration also inevitably meant that the radical literature would not obtain its intellectual goal of establishing a new paradigm, which the Caucus for a New Political Science had initially aspired to. Most notably, the radical and neo-Marxist strands of political theory that emerged during the 1970s were effectively subsumed into the neo-statist movement in political science. Therefore, a closer look at the development of this research agenda (a project that was organized and sponsored by the Social Science Research Council) shows the degree to which these ideas emerged through a dialogue and grappling with the new radical scholarship on politics, as well as the extent to which they were the products of the institutional environment through which disciplinary knowledge was systematized and disseminated (such as scholarly journals and conferences, the APSA, and the SSRC).

⁶ Lindblom, "Another State of Mind," 20.

The following section examines this disciplinary institutionalization of the state concept by discussing the origin and development of the SSRC's Committee on States and Social Structures. Lasting between 1983-1990, the Committee was the definitive effort at reintroducing the state concept and codifying the new state-focused research agenda with the 1985 publication of an edited conference volume titled *Bringing the State Back In*. This research agenda was an attempt to place into dialogue a variety of then-current theoretical frameworks and substantive findings. Influenced by (but also critical of) certain neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian understandings of the state and the relationship between political power and capitalist development, the individual case studies initially included in the project varied across geographical and historical examples. In addition to the "juxtaposition of Weberian understandings of the state with propositions drawn from recent neo-Marxist theories," their works also eclectically borrowed insights from world-systems analysis and dependency theory, neo-Keynesian political economy, and 1970s studies of bureaucratic authoritarianism and corporatism.⁷

For the purposes of my argument, however, I will focus primarily on this research agenda's critical engagement with neo-Marxist scholarship. Drawing upon the Committee's planning documents currently found at the Rockefeller Archive Center, I suggest that Marxism was both a key interlocutor and a foil against which the Committee's own research agenda could be differentiated. I argue that in the process of this disciplinary reception, much of the critical and normative elements involved in the Marxist theorization of the state were subsequently tamed and "domesticated" upon its entry into the discipline.

⁷ Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, "On the Road Toward a More Adequate Understanding of the State," in *Bringing the State Back In*, 348.

II. Origins and Purpose of the Committee

The Committee on States and Social Structures was originally conceived between 1979- by three scholars—Peter Evans and Dietrich Rueschemeyer of Brown University, and Theda Skocpol of the University of Chicago. The diverse research agenda initially articulated by the Committee was motivated less by a single paradigmatic vision of social scientific inquiry than by a shared discontent with the relative neglect of the state over the previous decades. Upon bringing the proposal before the Social Science Research Council, these scholars argued that the time was ripe for establishing a concerted research effort on the various dimensions of the modern state spanning across established academic disciplines, geographical areas and historical periods.

In part, the Committee was conceived as an extension and critique of a previously existing SSRC initiative, the Committee on Comparative Politics, which lasted from 1954 to 1972. Over the course of its existence, the CCP and its accompanying book series *Studies in Political Development* helped shape the course of research on political institutions and modernization. The CCP research program had promoted the integration of systems analysis and structural functionalism into political science; a greater emphasis on systematic evidence, empirical testing, and elaboration of falsifiable hypotheses; and the bringing of these theoretical frameworks to bear on non-Western and decolonizing countries. The study of modernization and political development through a functionalist framework also led the CCP to expand its scope of analysis beyond the formal institutions of the state, to the activities of individuals and associations within the political system—a theoretical shift that contributed to the nadir of the state concept in political science during the 1960s.⁸

⁸ Katznelson, “Strong Theory, Complex History: Structure and Configuration in Comparative Politics Revisited,” 98-99.

In contrast, the key justification for the Committee's existence was the recovery of a more analytically distinct understanding of the state from the "society-centered" frameworks of both pluralism and Marxism. The principal step toward the Committee was a conference organized by Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, and jointly sponsored by the SSRC and the American Council of Learned Societies. It was held in Mount Kisco, New York in February 1982 and titled "States and Social Structures: Research Implications of Current Theories of the State." During its planning stages, the importance of developing a research agenda on the state was justified to the SSRC as an extension and modification of existing discussions that had proven far too abstract and neglectful of the role of states as independent actors. In proposing the conference and the Research Planning Committee to follow in its wake, the organizers proclaimed that for too long research on the state had been scattered across disciplines and area specializations, which had obscured the ongoing importance of states for the stability of social structures, capitalist development, and the formulation of policy goals.⁹

The conference proposal submitted to the SSRC argued for a more coordinated effort to remedy this, observing that recently social scientists from different backgrounds had all been interested in the "macro-comparative study of state development and state capacities in relation to different social formations and patterns of social change." It noted that this revival of interest in the state was particularly important given the historical context of American social science, where "the conception of the state as a mere reflection of social structure and social change had gained wider currency and was less questioned than in Continental European social thought where an older tradition had long viewed the tension between state and society as crucial for any

⁹ Letter, Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol to Kenneth Prewitt, January 31, 1980, Box 301, Folder 3802, Series I, Social Science Research Council 19, the Rockefeller Archive Center.

understanding of social realities beyond the micro-level of analysis.”¹⁰ Intended as a commentary on the hegemonic status of pluralism in American political science and the corresponding marginalization of the state, this statement also recognized the changing character of the discipline in the prior decade.

The organizing rationale and proceedings of the Mt. Kisco conference show it was motivated by a different understanding of social scientific inquiry than what previously drove the neo-Marxist scholarship. The Miliband-Poulantzas debate of a decade earlier had by then been reduced to an opposition between instrumentalist and structuralist conceptions of the state, as well as a debate over method rather than substance; and by the late-1970s, neo-Marxist theories of the state were perceived as excessively abstract and neglectful of both empirical evidence and historical details. Thus, the conference organizers aimed to distinguish their own historical-comparative approach from what they saw the excessive abstraction of neo-Marxism. For example, Evans and Rueschemeyer observed that while their project was intended to be open to a broad range of theoretical outlooks, some strands of research such as the German derivation debate (excluding the works of Claus Offe and Joachim Hirsch) “raise severe problems of a rationalist insulation from historical reality and of exclusionary claims to a single right approach”¹¹ To counter these tendencies, the organizers maintained that a new generation of scholarship on states and social structures needed to display a much greater degree of attention to cross-national and historical variation among its cases. In setting out the view of the state as a relatively autonomous actor that was both influenced by and in turn influenced the surrounding

¹⁰ Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, “States and Social Structures: An Agenda for Interdisciplinary Dialogue and Research,” Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, September 1980, Box 301, Folder 3802, Series I, Social Science Research Council 19, the Rockefeller Archive Center.

¹¹ Peter Evans and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Letter to Richard Fagen, Hans Jürgen Puhle, and Guillermo O’Donnell, November 19, 1980, Folder 3802, Box 301, Series I, Social Science Research Council 19, the Rockefeller Archive Center.

social structure, they wished to open up a new trajectory of research that granted political factors their due place in the explanation of social processes. Therefore, during its planning stages, the purpose of the conference was proclaimed to “develop better conceptual and methodological tools for the comparative study of states and their surrounding social structures.”¹²

From its initial stages, the project emphasized studying the state through comparative case studies, hypothesis testing, and the formulation of empirically-driven, middle-range theory. The conference proposal thus called for moving beyond a “generalized theoretical discussion over whether ‘the state,’ or ‘the state in capitalist society,’ has an independent impact on the course of societal change.” By accepting this independence as a given, they sought to devote more attention to the “development of hypotheses about the variable conditions for autonomous and effective state action and to the advancement of comparative research.”¹³ The conference program also repeated this call for moving beyond abstract discussions of the state in capitalist society, claiming that “whether one believes that greater heuristic advantage comes from positing state autonomy or from assuming that socioeconomic forces shape and limit state structures and activities, the current challenge is to advance comparative research on theoretically relevant problems.”¹⁴

What were these theoretically relevant problems? The Mt. Kisco conference was organized around four thematic sessions. The first, “Theories of the State as Frameworks of Research,” featuring papers by Theda Skocpol, Stephen Krasner, and Claus Offe, sought to move beyond existing debates about the merits of alternative state paradigms, urging the participants to

¹² Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, Letter to Prewitt, January 31, 1980.

¹³ Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, “States and Social Structures: An Agenda for Interdisciplinary Dialogue and Research,” Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, September 1980, 15.

¹⁴ Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, “Statement of Purpose,” Conference on Research Implications of Current Theories of the State, Seven Springs Conference Center, February 25-27, 1982, Folder 1324, Box 219, Series I, Social Science Research Council 19. Program, the Rockefeller Archive Center.

concentrate on how the adoption of a particular theoretical perspective affected empirical investigations and causal relationships. The second session, “State Capacities, Economic Development, and Social Redistribution,” featuring papers by Alice Amsden, Fred Block, Peter Evans and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Peter Katzenstein, concentrated on the varying capacities of states to intervene in society—in particular with regard to economic transformation and the redistribution of social wealth and benefits. The third session, “States and Transnational Relations,” with papers by Richard Rubinson and Charles Tilly, explored the political and military capacities of states in a geopolitical context. Lastly, the fourth session, “State Structures and Social Conflict,” with papers by Pierre Birnbaum, Ira Katznelson, Alfred Stepan, and Göran Therborn, focused on the manner in which state institutions shaped the conditions under which social classes, class fragments, and interest groups competed for political power. A fifth, concluding session led by Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol summarized the conference proceedings and pointed the way forward to a potential future research agenda.

The project cast a wide net in terms of the potential areas of deeper inquiry into the state, identifying possibly sub-themes of research such as the comparative study of state-building, the consequences of transnational linkages for state “strength” and capacities, the determinants of “policy-instruments,” the outcomes of state economic intervention, and the role of state-owned enterprises.¹⁵ In their follow up to the conference, Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol formulated a further agenda for the Committee, soliciting feedback from dozens of scholars.¹⁶ As indicated by their circulated memoranda some months after the conference, the organizers’

¹⁵ Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, Memorandum regarding the States and Social Structures Project, July 14, 1982, Folder 3787, Box 299, Series I, Social Science Research Council 19. Program, the Rockefeller Archive Center.

¹⁶ This list included figures like Guillermo O’Donnell, Theodore Lowi, and Eric Nordlinger, as well as conference participants like Therborn and Offe. While SSRC records show that certain other Marxist scholars, including Ralph Miliband, Norberto Bobbio, and Ernesto Laclau, were considered for outreach, they ultimately did not participate in the project’s formative stages.

ultimate aim with this outreach was to clarify what interdisciplinary work on the state would be most fruitful, which approaches and issues could effectively cut across different areas and periods, and to help coordinate these diverse research efforts. While the majority of responses were encouraging and positive, there were also critics. For example, Gabriel Almond, a leading figure in the CCP, pointed out that the state had already been covered in the Committee's book series on Political Development, and thus that the new proposal had misrepresented the exigency of the new research agenda.¹⁷ In response, Skocpol maintained that despite some notable exceptions (such as the work of Charles Tilly), the CCP had indeed deemphasized states as institutions in order to move away from the formalist and constitutionalist theories of the state prominent during the first half of the twentieth century, and in order to highlight the importance of political culture and social processes that were insufficiently captured by those earlier models.¹⁸

Despite the diversity of perspectives included when soliciting feedback on the project, the organizers also identified a handful of topics that were indispensable to its success. Among these were the analytic definition of state structures across different national and historical contexts; the question of state capacity or state strength in relation to society, and the possible degree to which state capacity was a multifaceted quality rather than a binary of strong and weak; the role of bureaucratic institutions in contributing to state capacity, and the relationship between these forms of state organization and classes and interest groups; and the diverging historical processes

¹⁷ Letter, Gabriel A. Almond to Martha Gephart, January 24, 1983, Folder 1325, Box 220, Series I, Social Science Research Council 19, the Rockefeller Archive Center.

¹⁸ Letter, Theda Skocpol to Gabriel Almond, February 1, 1983, Folder 1325, Box 220, Series I, Social Science Research Council 19, the Rockefeller Archive Center.

Notably, Tilly's edited SSRC volume *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), by his own account, did not attempt to arrive at a common definition of the state (70). Skocpol and Almond's disagreement over the validity of neo-statist research would culminate in Almond's critique "The Return to the State," and a set of responses by Eric Nordlinger, Theodore Lowi, and Sergio Fabbrini.

by which state capacities emerged and changed, including the importance of preexisting state structures, a society's place within the world system, and its form of economic organization and class conflict at a given point in time.¹⁹

Formally submitted to the SSRC in April 1983, the proposal to establish the Committee saw the original trio expanded to also include Albert Hirschman, Peter Katzenstein, Ira Katznelson, Stephen Krasner, and Charles Tilly. Defining itself against the 'grand theories' and structural-functionalist models of political development of the 1950s-60s, it observed that much of current research on the state that followed the termination of the CCP in 1972 was confined to specific area studies. It maintained the need to bring together cross-disciplinary and cross-regional research on the state into a more systematic and comparative framework—to “conceptualize the organizational structures of states, to explain how they are formed and reorganized over time, and to explore how states affect societies through their policies and through their patterned relationships with social groups.”²⁰ Rather than beginning with a general theory of the state in advance and applying it to various cases, the Committee noted that “the structuring and dynamics of the state can only be understood through historically sensitive comparative analyses of both states and societies, and states and transnational relations,” thus generating improved conceptualizations and explanations of state structures and capacities.²¹

The finalized proposal identified four primary areas in which the Committee would pursue its research: Social Knowledge and State Interventions; Transnational Linkages and State

¹⁹ Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, Memorandum regarding the States and Social Structures Project, July 14, 1982.

²⁰ Peter Evans, Albert Hirschman, Peter Katzenstein, Ira Katznelson, Stephen Krasner, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Theda Skocpol, and Charles Tilly, Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, April, 1983, p. 1, Folder 1324, Box 219, Section I, Social Science Research Council 19, the Rockefeller Archive Center.

²¹ Evans et al., Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, April, 1983, 18.

Policies; The Formation and Reorganization of States; and the Impact of States on Collective Political Action. With the institutional backing of the SSRC, over the next seven years the Committee organized a series of working groups around topics such as Contemporary Patterns of State-Led Industrialization; the Transnational Diffusion of Policy-relevant Economic Knowledge; States, Knowledge-Bearing Occupations and Social Policy Making; and War Settlement and State Structures. In addition, it produced two edited volumes—*Bringing the State Back In* (1985) and *The Political Power of Economic Ideas* (1989)—as well as organized smaller seminars, published a newsletter, and provided research grants. By the time the Committee was discharged in 1990 due to budgetary constraints, the SSRC’s annual report noted that it had “established an important intellectual presence, and no longer represents the ‘fledgling initiative’ to which scarce resources must be devoted.”²² The proliferation of state-centered research in comparative politics during the 1990s was a testament to the influence of this program on a new generation of scholarship.

The Committee was a major step in the institutionalization of the state concept. At the same time, this renovation of a critical concept for political science was accomplished by contrasting its own version of state theory with that of the neo-Marxists. More so than any of the finalized essays published in the conference volume *Bringing the State Back In*, the planning documents for the Committee reveal how the project was formulated with a close awareness of then-contemporary neo-Marxist literature on the state. Such was the perception even prior to the official formation of the Committee, when following the conference at Mt. Kisco, Göran Therborn called the proposed research agenda “sectarian and unnecessary” in its treatment of the state as a social actor in its own right. Therborn believed there were substantial grounds for

²² Annual Reports, Social Science Research Council, 143. Obtained via email from the Social Science Research Council on May 10, 2016.

overlap with neo-Marxist approaches equally concerned with the state as an institution affected by social forces.²³ And in a prior correspondence responding to the initial proposal for the Research Committee, Offe wrote that he was “fully convinced that...states must, contrary to some Marxist and most pluralist teachings, be understood as a ‘relatively autonomous’ structure and agent of social change (rather than a derivative phenomenon).”²⁴

Yet despite these grounds for overlap, the project’s organizers largely aimed for the supersession of neo-Marxian debates. In fact, four Marxist scholars—Katznelson, Offe, Therborn, and Block—attended the Mt. Kisco conference; and in addition, during its planning stages a paper by Guillermo O’Donnell titled “Beyond Relative Autonomy: The Current Marxist Debate” had been scheduled to appear, before O’Donnell withdrew shortly before the conference.²⁵ Yet the fact that of these papers only Katznelson’s made it into *Bringing the State Back In*, coupled with Theda Skocpol’s critique of neo-Marxist research in its Introduction (and elsewhere), meant that the book, and the Committee’s intellectual output as a whole, ended up over-representing the Weberian-institutionalist approach and drawing a starker contrast between it and the neo-Marxist research of the prior decade.²⁶

²³ Letter, Göran Therborn to Dietrich Rueschemeyer, July 9, 1982, Folder 1325, Box 220, Series I, Social Science Research Council 19, the Rockefeller Archive Center.

²⁴ Letter, Claus Offe to Dietrich Rueschemeyer, December 17, 1980; Folder 3802, Box 301, Series I, Social Science Research Council 19, the Rockefeller Archive Center.

²⁵ Katznelson presented a paper titled “Class Formation and the State: Nineteenth Century England in American Perspective;” Offe presented a paper titled “Competitive Party Democracy and the Keynesian Welfare State: Some Reflections upon their Historical Limits”; Block discussed “State Capacities and Economic Rationalization: Industrial and Post-Industrial Settings”; and Therborn presented “Structures of State, Forms of Politics: The Formation of a Bourgeois-Bureaucratic State in Sweden and its Political Effects.” These papers can be found in Folder 1323, Box 219, Series I, Social Science Research Council 19, the Rockefeller Archive Center.

²⁶ Skocpol recalled that she, Evans, and Rueschemeyer “decided what to include and not include based on a conception about how states as actors and structures might affect important outcomes, like economic development, public policy, and democracy. We wanted to publish some of the essays presented at the conference but not others. This meant we had to say no to powerful people who were senior to us. We even rewrote several of the essays, sent them back to the authors, and said, ‘Here it is. Does this say what you had in mind?’” See the Interview with Theda Skocpol, in *Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative*

To that end, the following section reconstructs the primary theoretical presuppositions of their research agenda, and highlights in greater detail how it sought to tip the scales in the opposite direction against the “society-oriented” neo-Marxist debates surveyed in the previous chapter. While the general grounds of the objections to neo-Marxism were already mentioned above, I wish to highlight the key aspects of their critique, while pointing to possible shortcomings and omissions in places where a more robust dialogue could have emerged.

III. The Critique of Neo-Marxism

On one hand, the Committee recognized that since the mid-1960s neo-Marxists had changed the terms of conversation on which social scientific discussions of politics were conducted.²⁷ In her introductory essay to *Bringing the State Back In*, Skocpol noted the importance of contributions made by Perry Anderson, John Holloway and Sol Picciotto, Ralph Miliband, Claus Offe, Nicos Poulantzas, Göran Therborn, and Immanuel Wallerstein for addressing themes such as the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the socioeconomic involvement of states in advanced industrial capitalist democracies, and the role of dependent states within the world capitalist economy. Together, they had opened the door to a new theoretical lineage from which to critique pluralist and structure-functionalist accounts and underscored the state’s importance to capitalist development and modernization.²⁸

Politics, eds. Gerardo L. Munck and Richard Snyder (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 674.

²⁷ Among the works specifically mentioned in the Committee’s finalized proposal to the SSRC were Holloway and Picciotto’s *State and Capital*, Miliband’s *The State in Capitalist Society* and *Marxism and Politics*, Offe’s “Structural Problems of the Capitalist State,” Poulantzas’ *Political Power and Social Classes*, Therborn’s *What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules?* and Fred Block’s “The Ruling Class Does Not Rule.” The latter was favorably invoked as the work that went the farthest in treating the state as an autonomous actor, and thus was most closely aligned with the project’s intellectual vision.

²⁸ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Current Research,” 5.

At the same time, the Committee, and especially Skocpol, saw these different strands of neo-Marxist theory as sharing two fundamental flaws that hindered their usefulness for conducting comparative research.

First, neo-Marxist theorists were prone to abstract generalization about features and functions shared by all states within a mode of production, a phase of capitalist accumulation, or a position in the world capitalist system, making it more difficult to “assign causal weight to variations in state structures and activities across nations and short time periods.”²⁹ Sophisticated neo-Marxist accounts of state autonomy like Therborn’s *What Does the Ruling Class Do When it Rules?* that attempted to provide typologies of the particular features shared by states within different modes of production fell short of offering concepts, explanatory hypotheses, or research agendas that captured the comparative and historical aspect of state structures and their activities.³⁰ Thus, while neo-Marxist theories were potentially applicable and testable in comparisons of states *across* different modes of production, their tendency to abstraction when dealing with cases strictly *within* the capitalist mode of production made them less effective for comparative historical analysis.³¹ In light of the sheer variation of state activities across time and space, the Committee largely rejected the analytic attempts at generating “universally applicable” theories of the state specific to a given mode of production. Per Skocpol, “the gap between abstract theoretical concepts and cross-national variations is just too wide. Needed instead, are concepts for analyzing political institutions and their effect – concepts that are somewhat

²⁹ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Current Research,” 5.

³⁰ Evans et al., Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, April, 1983, 6-7.

³¹ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Current Research,” 5, 33n16.

decoupled from the Marxian staple concepts of ‘modes of production’ and their associated ‘class relations.’”³²

Second, despite their internal differences, the Committee argued that all strands of neo-Marxist research remained society-centered, emphasizing the “social functions of the state – as an arena for class struggles and an instrument of class rule – and they typically sought to generalize about features shared by states within a mode of production or a phase of capitalist accumulation.”³³ While acknowledging that Marxist political sociology was correct in suggesting the importance of class tensions, the Committee pointed to works by Martin Shefter and Ira Katznelson on how state forms and political parties in industrialized countries affected the formation of working class identity, which suggested that “the political expression of class interests and conflicts is neither automatic nor economically determined.” Rather than being inherently shaped by the class struggle and the mode of production, it was important to emphasize how “states condition the capacities of social classes to achieve collective consciousness, organization, and political representation,” whether directly or indirectly.³⁴ Neo-Marxist approaches ruled out the potential forms of autonomous state action and the ways that states could shape the class struggle—two claims that formed the basis of the Committee’s research agenda.³⁵

Skocpol’s introductory essay in *Bringing the State Back In* only briefly addressed these insufficiencies. However, by the time of her involvement with the Committee, she had already

³² Theda Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research,” January 1982, Folder 1323, Box 219, Series I, Social Science Research Council 19, the Rockefeller Archive Center, 42.

³³ Evans et al., Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, April, 1983, 6.

³⁴ Evans et al., Proposal to the SSRC for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, April, 1983, 14.

³⁵ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Current Research,” 5.

published a number of important works on the relation of the state to society that laid out much of the critique of neo-Marxism reiterated in that piece and in the Committee's planning documents. Since her efforts loomed the largest in defining the Committee's research agenda, her earlier work warrants discussion as the most representative critique of then contemporary neo-Marxist state theory and as the most important catalyst for the reception of this scholarship in American political science.³⁶

At the heart of Skocpol's challenge to Marxist state theory was its neglect of the state as a set of potentially autonomous institutions whose actions and interests could be at odds with those of the economically dominant class. As early as her 1973 critique of Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* she invoked the contributions of Miliband and Poulantzas as examples of various Marxist explanations of the state's role in relationship to the class structure of society. Her conclusion was that in all of these examples, "nowhere is the *possibility* admitted that state organizations and elites might under certain circumstances act *against* the long-run economic interest of a dominant class, or act to create a new mode of production." Marxists could not "unequivocally accept the notion of fully independent, non class-conditioned state action" even in cases such as the absolutist state or industrializing bureaucratic states.³⁷

In first book, *States and Social Revolutions*, Skocpol developed her own view of the state as a center of power whose interests could not be fully derived from or reduced to those of capitalist elites or the class struggle in society, in contrast to society-centric Marxist paradigms that tended to "either analytically collapse state and society or reduce political and state actions

³⁶ For a critique of Skocpol's influence on the reception of Marxism in American political science, see Waddell, "When the Past is Not Prologue."

³⁷ Theda Skocpol, "A Critical Review of Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*," *Politics & Society* 4 (1973): 18.

to representations of socioeconomic forces and interests.”³⁸ Classical Marxists like Lenin saw the state as an agent of the dominant class—a “concentrated means of coercion” in all class-divided modes of production, whose role was to contain class conflict and undertake policies in support of the dominance of the surplus-appropriating and property-owning classes. Yet while the state was understood as a form of class-based domination and an object of revolutionary struggle, it was not an “organization-for-itself” whose interests could potentially be at odds with that of the ruling class.³⁹ In contrast to these earlier accounts, Skocpol recognized that contemporary neo-Marxists like Poulantzas, Offe, Therborn, and Perry Anderson largely rejected the instrumentalist conception of the state, instead focusing on the relative autonomy of the state from the direct control of the dominant class. For these theories, “state rulers may have to be free of control by specific dominant-class groups and personnel if they are to be able to implement policies that serve the fundamental interest of an entire dominant class.”⁴⁰ Yet they were likewise said to assume that “state forms and activities vary in correspondence with modes of production, and that state rulers cannot possibly act against the basic interests of a dominant class.”⁴¹

Due to the variety of neo-Marxist approaches to the state, Skocpol and her fellow organizers on the Committee needed to identify the reasons why each of these theories was insufficient for analyzing the state as an autonomous source of power. The proposal for the Mt. Kisco conference identified three broad lines of argumentation that were systematically rejected by the Committee: instrumentalism, where the state reflected the interests of the dominant social groups as conveyed and represented by their members holding positions in the state apparatus; structuralism, where the state reflected “the objective requirements for systemic stability,” which

³⁸ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 17.

³⁹ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 27.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 28.

were implemented by the state personnel regardless of the dominant social groups' support for those policies; and the "pluralist" or "class conflict" model where the state was seen as representing the outcome of social conflicts in which subordinate groups could obtain significant victories.⁴² Skocpol had initially proposed these broadly constructed typologies in her 1980 article "Political Responses to Capitalist Crisis," her treatment of the New Deal as a case study testing the neo-Marxist hypotheses of state autonomy.⁴³ A similar characterization of these approaches then appeared in her 1982 draft of the Mt. Kisco paper that formed the basis of her introductory essay in *Bringing the State Back In*. Analyzed together, these works provide an effective overview of Skocpol's reasons for claiming the insufficiency of the neo-Marxist attempts to theorize the capitalist state.

Like most other scholars drawn to Marxist perspectives on the state, Skocpol's analysis was an attempted reconciliation with the consequences of the Miliband-Poulantzas debate. Primarily drawing upon the surveys of neo-Marxist literature made by Gold, Lo, and Wright, and Jessop, she adopted the binary between instrumentalism and structuralism/functionality as a starting point, even if only for the purposes of treating them as "useful ideal types within a broader analytical framework" for understanding the relation between the state and capitalist development.⁴⁴ Recognizing that instrumentalism was the starting point for most arguments involving more sophisticated versions of Marxist state theory, she took a softer stance than many critics of Miliband, in suggesting that *The State in Capitalist Society* sketched a "broad frame of

⁴² Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, "States and Social Structures: An Agenda for Interdisciplinary Dialogue and Research," Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, September 1980.

⁴³ Theda Skocpol, "Political Response to Capitalist Crisis: Neo-Marxist Theories of the State and the Case of the New Deal," *Politics & Society* 10 (1980): 155-201; Kenneth Finegold and Theda Skocpol, *State and Party in America's New Deal* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995). See also Theda Skocpol and Kenneth Finegold, "State Capacity and Economic Intervention in the Early New Deal," *Political Science Quarterly* 97 (1982): 255-278.

⁴⁴ Finegold and Skocpol, *State and Party in America's New Deal*, 176.

reference” rather than explaining a particular kind of political outcome.⁴⁵ And in “Political Response to Capitalist Crisis” she shared with both elite-theoretical and neo-Marxist arguments the conviction that pluralism was an insufficient theoretical framework for explaining the complex interactions between political and economic forces in the context of contemporary capitalism, in part because of those arguments’ tendency to subsume institutional change under the evolutionist rubric of modernization.⁴⁶

At the same time, a central claim of that essay on the explanatory power of neo-Marxist theories for the establishment of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933-35 and the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 was that instrumentalist or “corporate liberal” accounts were the least plausible alternative. Accounts such as those of G. William Domhoff, James Weinstein, Ronald Radosh, and James O’Connor were a “strong” variant of instrumentalism that explained state intervention as the result of a far-sighted “vanguard” corporate capitalist class, whose members leveraged their strategic economic positions to pressure politicians to implement reforms. Against this reading, Skocpol argued that there was no “self-conscious, disciplined capitalist class, or vanguard of major capitalists, that put forward functional strategies for recovery and stabilization and had the political power to implement them successfully.”⁴⁷ The federal government was ineffective in organizing inter-industry organization; and industrial capitalists, rather than small business owners, were at the forefront of the resistance for granting concessions to labor. U.S. capitalists were thus neither far sighted nor unified enough to “use” the state to engineer an effective response.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Skocpol, “Political Response to Capitalist Crisis,” 161; Finegold and Skocpol, *State and Party in America’s New Deal*, 176.

⁴⁶ Skocpol, “Political Response to Capitalist Crisis,” 155.

⁴⁷ Skocpol, “Political Response to Capitalist Crisis,” 163.

⁴⁸ For Domhoff’s response to the mischaracterized polemics against instrumentalism, see his “State Autonomy and the Privileged Position of Business: An Empirical Attack on a Theoretical Fantasy,”

After rejecting instrumentalism, Skocpol pointed to two other, more plausible alternatives: the “political functionalism” of early 1970s Poulantzas and the “class struggle” approach of Fred Block. In both accounts, one found theoretically innovative arguments that emphasized the state’s need for remaining independent from the direct control of the dominant class.

While acknowledging that Poulantzas adopted a class struggle approach in his later works, Skocpol’s treatment of Poulantzas at that point in time concentrated primarily on the arguments put forward in *Political Power and Social Classes* and the debate with Miliband. She agreed with Poulantzas that Miliband’s understanding of state autonomy was too theoretically indebted to neo-pluralist accounts to serve as an effective model for understanding state autonomy.⁴⁹ In contrast to instrumentalism, Poulantzas’ argument that the capitalist state is most effective when the ruling class is not the politically governing class raised a series of important questions for comparative-historical investigation. These included what kind of class interests were served by these bureaucratically-autonomous state apparatuses, what sorts of international and domestic crises they best responded to, and the extent to which these state institutions capable of autonomous policy-formulation and implementation were invariably made “present” when needed by the dominant classes.⁵⁰

However, Poulantzas’ contributions were marred by a functionalist logic that saw the capitalist state as invariably operating to stabilize the capitalist system. The relatively

Journal of Military and Political Sociology 14 (1986): 149-162; and “Corporate-Liberal Theory and the Social Security Act: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge,” (1987). Domhoff argued that a theory of a “potentially autonomous state” provided by Skocpol was already implicit in the work of C. Wright Mills. For Skocpol’s reply see: “A Brief Response” *Politics & Society* 15 (1987): 331-332.

⁴⁹ Skocpol, “Political Response to Capitalist Crisis,” 160; Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research,” 13.

⁵⁰ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research,” 13; Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Current Research,” 33n22.

autonomous state would, by necessity, “function to preserve order in capitalist society and to sustain and enhance the conditions for capitalist economic activity” by both disuniting the revolutionary working class and organizing the internally divided capitalist class and its fractions into a power bloc in order to protect that class’s interests as a whole.⁵¹ Conceiving of the state as a form of system maintenance glossed over the potential variation between state organizations and the capitalist class, which could only be explored through empirical and historical studies.⁵² “Rather than exploring and seeking to explain the varying capacities of different states in various circumstances to formulate and implement policies adequate to the needs of the dominant classes or economies,” Poulantzas inflexibly posited the capitalist state as a necessary and general feature of the capitalist mode of production.⁵³ This neglected the unfolding of political and social struggles over time, subsuming these potentially deepening contradictions under a conception of the state that—short of a revolutionary break—was always able to return the social formation to a balance in which “the nation” prevailed over the working class.

In relation to the New Deal, Poulantzas’ theory could not account for two important developments. First, it implicitly assumed the existence of a centralized, bureaucratic administrative apparatus that could effectively manage the equilibrating forms of intervention that he assigned to the state. Yet his neglect of the different processes of state formation between the continental European states and the U.S. left his theory incapable of explaining the failure of the National Industrial Recovery Act. The capacity of modern states to implement effective strategies depended on the historical legacy of those state structures. Building his theory primarily upon the centralized French state of the 1950s-60s, Poulantzas overlooked how the

⁵¹ Skocpol, “Political Response to Capitalist Crisis,” 170.

⁵² A similar claim made from a diametrically opposite standpoint came from Easton, “The Political System Besieged by the State,” and *The Analysis of Political Structure* (Routledge, 1990), 155-237.

⁵³ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research,” Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Current Research,” 33n22.

historical absence of an effective national bureaucracy in the U.S. coupled with the institutional struggles between Congress and the Presidency left the country with a weak national government during the 1930s.⁵⁴ Lacking a necessary degree of state autonomy and administrative capacity, the federal government was unable to fully implement the NIRA. Its passage deepened the conflicts within the capitalist class rather than uniting them into a hegemonic power bloc, casting doubt on Poulantzas' general thesis that the state will be able to promote the interests of the capitalist class as a whole.

Secondly, Poulantzas' approach underestimated the manner in which political struggles and state actions in capitalist democracies could stimulate and accelerate challenges to capitalism from below. Poulantzas had suggested that the relatively autonomous state operated against the interests of the working class despite being capable of making concessions to them, which, in the long-term, still advanced the interests of the capitalist class. In testing this theory, Skocpol drew upon the counterexample of the Wagner Act and its effect of strengthening of industrial unions and the labor movement, suggesting that “the state” did not act in a unified way toward labor, and some elements within it were prepared to promote an entirely new system of industrial labor relations for the USA.”⁵⁵ In addition, it was the Democratic Party's relative independence from business interests that allowed it to implement these New Deal policies, underscoring the importance of party organizations for state autonomy (whereas Poulantzas had treated state strength and party effectiveness as inversely related). For these reasons, Skocpol suggested that Poulantzas' earlier formulations were far more helpful in predicting and explaining system-maintaining outcomes (a key New Deal example being the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, through which the state unified agricultural capitalists, eventually at the expense of its own

⁵⁴ Skocpol, “Political Response to Capitalist Crisis,” 173-75.

⁵⁵ Skocpol, “Political Response to Capitalist Crisis,” 181.

autonomy), rather than instances where the state failed to implement its policies due to deepening contradictions.⁵⁶ As she wrote, “Poulantzian theory predicts functional outcomes of state policies and interventions. It offers little direct theoretical guidance for explaining why and how failures of state policies could occur, especially not failures threatening to capitalists.”⁵⁷

Skocpol’s account of Poulantzas’ contributions captures both sides of the dilemma that neo-Marxist state theory had arrived at by the early 1980s, and which were identified by the Committee in their planning documents. In *Political Power and Social Classes* and the debate with Miliband, he effectively superseded orthodox Marxism by positing that relative autonomy was a definitive feature of the capitalist state. However, the abstraction and tendency toward functionalism of this approach obscured the potentially important differences of the varying capacities of states when it came to their institutional arrangements and the structural necessities they were subjected to. In contrast, Poulantzas’ turn toward a more political class struggle (or relational) approach, as exemplified in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, and *State, Power, Socialism*, was more attentive to the specific institutional and hegemonic variations within different types of regimes in the capitalist mode of production.⁵⁸ Yet Skocpol also saw this, in some ways, a regression. In re-conceptualizing the state as a condensation of class relations subject to a changing balance of dominant class fractions, Poulantzas had now absorbed his original insights about state autonomy into the problematic class reductionism that characterized all existing neo-Marxist research.⁵⁹ The latter approach was also less determinate, never specifying the causal mechanisms through which micro-level

⁵⁶ Finegold and Skocpol, *State and Party in America’s New Deal*, 182.

⁵⁷ Skocpol, “Political Response to Capitalist Crisis,” 172.

⁵⁸ In addition, Jessop suggests that Poulantzas’ allusions to relative autonomy in *State, Power, Socialism* were remnants of his earlier theory that obscured, rather than clarified, the relational theory of the state he had developed in that work.

⁵⁹ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research,” 14.

struggles within the relations of power translated to macro-level outcomes.⁶⁰ Furthermore, as was made clear in his debate with Miliband, Poulantzas had consistently maintained that the state apparatuses had no power of their own; what power they did have was the result of the displacement of the class struggle and the relations of production onto the political level. Such a characterization was clearly at odds with the strong institutional view of state power advanced by Skocpol.

Therefore, in both versions of Poulantzas' argument, the state could not be "absolutely or totally autonomous, independent from capitalists in a way that does not serve capitalists' larger interests."⁶¹ Yet despite her critique of the class-reductionist tendencies of Marxism, Skocpol's analysis of contending theories found the most value in the "class struggle" approach. The "class struggle" theory that most aligned with Skocpol's own understanding of the state was the one developed by Fred Block.⁶² Unlike other class struggle approaches, such as those found in Poulantzas or in the German capital-logic school, both of which were said to have collapsed the state into class relations, Block's came the closest to recognizing the state's autonomy vis-à-vis the capitalist class.⁶³ Although he followed Offe in maintaining that the state reproduced capitalism through a process of policy selectivity, Block emphasized to a greater degree the roles played by state managers—primarily elected politicians and upper-level civil servants—as well as by the working class in explaining state-capitalist relations.

Per Block, capitalist society is characterized by a division of labor between those who accumulate capital and those who manage the state apparatus. The capacity of the state to finance

⁶⁰ Finegold and Skocpol, *State and Party in America's New Deal*, 181.

⁶¹ Finegold and Skocpol, *State and Party in America's New Deal*, 180.

⁶² See Fred Block, *Revising State Theory: Essays in Politics and Postindustrialism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), especially the essays "Beyond Corporate Liberalism," "The Ruling Class Does Not Rule: Notes on the Marxist Theory of the State," and "Beyond Relative Autonomy: State Managers as Historical Subjects."

⁶³ Skocpol, "Political Response to Capitalist Crisis," 159.

itself and its public legitimacy depended greatly on its ability to effectively maintain the capitalist system and the encouragement of “business confidence.” As the more far-sighted group concerned with the reproduction of the social order and the prolongation of their own influence and power, state managers were much more likely to formulate policies in the interest of the capitalist class, acting to facilitate capital accumulation and instill business confidence. This structural dependence of the state on capital by default gave the capitalist class a large amount of influence and a veto over state policies perceived as being against their interests. At the same, state managers were also subject to working class mobilization and pressure for social reforms. Situated on the terrain between the level of economic activity and the intensity of the class struggle, state managers were thus responsible for “rationalizing” and reforming capitalism to overcome its economic contradictions and integrate the working class into the social order.⁶⁴ In the case of the New Deal, at a time when the capitalist class was weakened and disorganized, a conjunction of working-class pressures and the desire of state managers to increase their institutional power allowed for the passage of measures such as the Social Security Act and the Wagner Act.⁶⁵

Yet despite this theoretical breakthrough, Block’s account also required a greater degree of historical and empirical specification. Skocpol maintained “no existing neo-Marxist approach affords sufficient weight to state and party organizations as independent determinants of political conflicts and outcomes.”⁶⁶ If Block’s argument was that the class struggle acted as an external pressure on the state bureaucracy, Skocpol reversed this dynamic: state institutions, at least in certain historical conjunctures shaped the viability of the class struggle. During the 1930s the U.S. industrial working class was not strong enough to force concessions through economic

⁶⁴ Block, “The Ruling Class Does Not Rule,” in *Revising State Theory*, 67.

⁶⁵ Skocpol “Political Response to Capitalist Crisis,” 185.

⁶⁶ Skocpol, “Political Responses,” 199.

disruption such as labor strikes, nor did the efforts of state managers automatically ensure the economic recovery of the New Deal. Instead, the working class acted as an interest group that could be effectively mobilized electorally by the Democratic Party; and the efforts of state managers were “channeled, shaped, and limited by existing state and party structures not conducive to fully effective state interventions,” such as federalism and the absence of a truly effective national bureaucracy.⁶⁷ The example of the New Deal thus made clear the importance of party activities and patterns of prior state development for the translation of the class struggle into electoral behavior.⁶⁸

Skocpol would return to this argument in her presentation of the literature at the Mt. Kisco conference, where the class struggle strand of neo-Marxism was represented by the select works of Claus Offe, Göran Therborn, and Gösta Esping-Andersen, Erik Olin Wright, and Roger Friedland. Per Offe, the capitalist state is characterized by an internal selectivity on the levels of structure, ideology, process, and repression. Through these selective mechanisms, political institutions formulate a common class interest out of narrower and possibly conflicting influences on policy—creating outcomes in favor of the capitalist class, preserving the ideological view of the state as a neutral arena, and deflecting forces that would challenge the process of the accumulation of capital.⁶⁹ For Therborn, the characteristics of the state vary in accordance with the mode of production, and its task, as a “formally bounded system of structured processes within a global system of societal processes,” is to channel and shape class-struggle political inputs into outputs that continue to reproduce the mode of production.⁷⁰ And

⁶⁷ Skocpol, “Political Responses,” 191.

⁶⁸ Finegold and Skocpol, *State and Party in America's New Deal*, 176.

⁶⁹ Offe, “Structural Problems of the Capitalist State: Class Rule and the Political System. On the Selectiveness of Political Institutions,” 31-54

⁷⁰ Göran Therborn, *What Does the Ruling Class Do When it Rules?* (London: Verso, 1978), 37.

for Esping-Andersen, Wright, and Friedland, both the structure of the state and the content of its policies were shaped through a reciprocal relationship with the class struggle.⁷¹

What all three accounts shared, she argued, was the claim that the state was a nexus of institutions that ultimately shaped class struggles and outcomes in favor of capitalism. But despite their insights that states ought to be treated as structures with selective and channeling effects, and that state institutions could pattern class relations, Skocpol maintained that these structural and class-struggle approaches continued to suffer from problems of class reductionism. By analyzing state structures and their effects in class terms, they overlooked how states “have their own organizational forms and logics, which in turn influence politics not only in class-biased ways but also in ways equally relevant (or irrelevant) for all classes.”⁷² Furthermore, accounts like Therborn’s that sought to nuance their abstract discussion of modes of production by attributing the forms taken by specific state institutions to the outcome of historical class struggles frequently lapsed into tautologies and away from “testable theoretical generalizations.”⁷³

This examination of Skocpol’s critique of contemporary neo-Marxism shows the extent to which the Committee’s research agenda was situated as part of a broader dialogue with that body of scholarship. It saw neo-Marxist attempts at defining the state as potentially useful for generating research questions, analytical concepts, and causal hypotheses on the relationship between state and society; but also as insufficient for testing those same concepts and hypotheses through comparative historical case studies and the construction of generalizations proceeding

⁷¹ Gösta Esping-Andersen, Erik Olin Wright and Roger Friedland, “Modes of Class Struggle and the Capitalist State,” *Kapitalistate* 4/5 (1976): 186-220.

⁷² Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research,” 41.

⁷³ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research,” 42.

from empirical research.⁷⁴ Instead, the Committee wished to provide “explanations built on propositions about the activities of concrete groups,” rather than on the “application of analytical conceptual abstractions characteristic of certain structural-functionalist or neo-Marxist ‘theories.’”⁷⁵ As exemplified by the debate over the New Deal, Marxist approaches that focused on the capitalist state in general and derived patterns of state intervention and political conflict from the mode of production, needed to be supplemented by research that took into account the cross-nationally and historically-varying structures of states and political parties, whose histories and legacies were often independent of but parallel to capitalist economic development.⁷⁶

Therefore, neo-Marxist accounts such as those of Poulantzas, Offe, and Therborn primarily distinguished themselves from the earlier classical Marxist, instrumentalist, and state monopoly capitalist theories by maintaining that the relative autonomy of the capitalist state was a structurally necessary component of the capitalist mode of production. In turn, the Committee’s research agenda distanced itself from these approaches on the basis of them suffering from a dual problem of conceptual abstraction and a class-reductive or society-reductive framework, both of which were consequences of positing the capitalist mode of production as an analytical starting point. As Skocpol concluded in her survey of competing theories, “almost all neo-Marxists theorize about ‘the capitalist state’ in general, thus attempting to explain patterns of state intervention and political conflict in analytic terms directly derived from a model about the capitalist mode of production as such.”⁷⁷ The internal debates within the neo-Marxist literature ultimately resulted in the view of the state as an abstract category and the proliferation of classificatory schemes.

⁷⁴ Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State*, 125.

⁷⁵ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Current Research,” 31.

⁷⁶ Skocpol, “Political Response to Capitalist Crisis,” 200.

⁷⁷ Skocpol, “Political Response to Capitalist Crisis,” 200.

IV. The Autonomous State

Given the manner in which the Committee defined its own research agenda vis-à-vis the neo-Marxist literature, it is also important to elaborate the common themes found in neo-statist scholarship and its conception of “state autonomy” on the basis of which this research agenda distinguished itself from the excessively “society-oriented” neo-Marxist contributions. Although the scholarship subsumed in the Committee’s sphere often used the principle of state autonomy as a distinguishing feature of its research agenda, it also contained some key tensions—primarily regarding the state’s relationship to society and the organizational unity of its component institutions.

In contrast to neo-Marxist approaches, in *States and Social Revolutions* Skocpol suggested that her “organizational” or “realist” perspective “refuses to treat states as if they were mere analytic aspects of abstractly conceived modes of production, or even political aspects of concrete class relations and struggles.”⁷⁸ Against the first view, articulated by Poulantzas’ in *Political Power and Social Classes*, she maintained that states were not primarily analytic concepts (or abstract-formal objects) but actual institutions whose power originated elsewhere than in the control over the means of production by a dominant class.⁷⁹ And against both the later Poulantzas and fellow class-struggle approaches, she maintained that states did not merely channel the class relations of a given society but were historical subjects in their own right, as evidenced by the preferences and interests of those groups and individuals who administered state institutions.

⁷⁸ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 31.

⁷⁹ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research,” 16.

According to this view, states were a “set of administrative, policing, and military organizations headed, and more or less well coordinated by, an executive authority.”⁸⁰ Conceived as political actors, these bureaucratic administrations were characterized by hierarchical domination and coercive power. Different types of states were distinguished by features such as administrative efficiency, political capacities for mass mobilization and resource extraction, military strength, and their position within the international territorial system. For the latter point, Skocpol drew upon Otto Hintze’s classical realist view of state structures as embedded in the boundary between the domestic sociopolitical orders they maintained and the international sphere. Hence states were subjected to the changing dynamics of the geopolitical environment, inter-state military and economic competition, and the diffusion of ideas and policy models.

Positing the state as an institutional actor with its own internal dynamics and organizational logic meant putting forward a stronger conception of state autonomy than was found in the neo-Marxist accounts. The notion of relative autonomy developed in the wake of the Miliband-Poulantzas debate suggested that the state’s existence was conducive to the capitalist system, and explained the purposes of state interventions by their results.⁸¹ In rejecting the implicit functionalism of these accounts, Skocpol and her colleagues proposed beginning with the premise of a potentially autonomous state, and only then “attempting to specify conditions under which various elements of the contrasting models, as well as hypotheses about state structures and elites themselves, account for different forms and degrees of autonomous state

⁸⁰ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 29.

⁸¹ Gregory Albo and Jane Jensen, “A Contested Concept: The Relative Autonomy of the State,” in *The New Canadian Political Economy*, ed. Wallace Clement and Glen Williams, 180-211 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989).

action in various kinds of situations.”⁸² In other words, the relative autonomy of the state was not theoretically pre-determined by the structures of the capitalist mode of production, since different forms and degrees of autonomous state action could be traced to different historical conditions. By specifying the causal mechanisms through which state policies emerged and either succeeded *or failed* (as with the example of the New Deal), one could transform abstract theories into workable and falsifiable hypotheses, and thus move beyond neo-Marxist arguments about the various social determinations affecting the so-called capitalist state.

In a succinct definition of state autonomy from *Bringing the State Back In*, Skocpol proposed that “states conceived as organizations claiming control over territories and people may formulate and pursue goals that are not simply reflective of the demands or interests of social groups, classes, or society.”⁸³ And in *States and Social Revolutions*, she argued that society-reductive analyses did not conceive of states as “administrative and coercive organizations—organizations that are potentially autonomous from (though of course conditioned by) socioeconomic interests and structures.”⁸⁴ The internal organization of states gave them a degree of autonomy and their own distinct interests vis-à-vis dominant classes.⁸⁵ Depending on the circumstances, state organizations could find themselves competing with dominant classes in the appropriation of economic and social resources, and the purposes to which they applied these resources could differ from dominant-class interests: “Fundamental conflicts or interest might arise between the existing dominant class or set of groups, on the one hand, and the state rulers

⁸² Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, “States and Social Structures: An Agenda for Interdisciplinary Dialogue and Research,” Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, September 1980, 5-6.

⁸³ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Current Research,” 9.

⁸⁴ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 14.

⁸⁵ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 31.

on the other.”⁸⁶ At certain critical junctures, the state could make concessions to subordinate classes in order to preserve its own interests in administering its territory and population, and collecting revenue. In short, the notion of state autonomy adopted by Skocpol implied the contingent possibility that there would be historical and policy disjunctures between state and capital.⁸⁷

In developing this argument, Skocpol pointed to a number of contemporary studies on state autonomy conducted by scholars like Eric Nordlinger, Ellen Kay Trimberger, Alfred Stepan, and Stephen Krasner.⁸⁸ With the exception of Nordlinger’s “neo-pluralist” account, which treated the state as an aggregate of elected and administrative officials, these authors all shared a conception of the state initially developed by Weber and Hintze that saw it as a set of administrative, coercive, and legal institutions.⁸⁹ These works had put forward explanations for how states could formulate and pursue their own goals; including how the linkage of states into transnational structures and international flows of communication allowed state officials to act against the wishes of domestic social forces, states’ basic need to maintain territorial control leading them to initiate reforms or repressions, and the insulation of state officials from ties to socioeconomic interests leaving them more capable of launching distinct public policies.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 27.

⁸⁷ Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State*, 127.

⁸⁸ Eric A. Nordlinger, *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Stephen D. Krasner, *Defending the National Interest: Raw Materials Investments and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Alfred Stepan, *The State and Society: Peru in Contemporary Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Ellen Kay Trimberger, *Revolution from Above: Military Bureaucrats and Development in Japan, Turkey, Egypt, and Peru* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1978).

⁸⁹ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research,” 16.

⁹⁰ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research,” 15

At the same time, this assertion of the state as a distinct social actor in its own right posed the question of state strength or capacity. The Committee recognized that “lurking never far in the background is the image of a strong, effective state as a centralized, unitary, bureaucratic chain of command through which disciplined officials tell social groups what to do.”⁹¹ This ideal type of a strong state influenced by Weber had taken it for granted that “states are potentially autonomous and that the controllers of the means of coercion and administration may pursue goals at variance with dominant classes or any other social group.”⁹² On occasion, the Committee’s emphasis on the primacy of the state veered into this “strong” version of their argument—especially when contrasting its own research agenda to that of pluralist and neo-Marxist scholarship. Yet the planning documents also made the more nuanced claim that state strength and capacity had to be studied through a more multi-faceted approach.

In 1968, J.P. Nettl’s influential essay “The State as a Conceptual Variable” suggested comparing different societies by examining their varying degrees of “stateness.” While recognizing the importance of this insight and the theoretical link between state strength to state autonomy, the Committee questioned the strong/weak state binary that this approach implied, arguing that state strength or state capacity needed to be evaluated on the basis of the goals that states pursued and the possible variation of outcomes that followed. As Evans and Rueschemeyer had written, “debates over relative autonomy and the capacity of the state to intervene in the process of accumulation are too often carried on in terms of categorical theoretical pronouncements rather than focusing on an analysis of historical variation.”⁹³

⁹¹ Evans et al., Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, April 1983, 15.

⁹² Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, “On the Road Toward a More Adequate Understanding of the State,” 350.

⁹³ Peter Evans and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, “The State and Economic Transformation,” *Bringing the State Back In*, 70.

One reason that the strong/weak dichotomy posed a problem was the variety of ways that state capacities could be theorized. According to the neo-Weberian conception, strong (and autonomous) states had the ability to formulate and realize goals that diverged from those of the most powerful segments of societal elites. At the same time, the Committee noted that state strength could also be understood as an opposite proposition: the ability of the state to impose the goals of the dominant elite onto society. In addition to these two possibilities there was also the international dimension of state strength—the ability of states to maintain powerful positions with regard to the economic, political, and military competition found in the international sphere.⁹⁴ Therefore, state strength varied depending on whether one looked domestically, where it was taken to mean the ability of those individuals or groups occupying state institutions to promote their own interests and resist pressures from “private” elite groups in civil society; or internationally, where it meant the capacities of states to survive when facing military and economic competition with others. For these reasons, the Committee suggested that there were different dimensions of state strength in relation to different tasks; for example, a state’s ability to preserve its territorial integrity did not imply its ability to intervene in or transform its surrounding social structure, or vice versa.

This question of evaluating state capacity also raised the related issue of bureaucratic institutions, and the degree to which state strength could be studied in accordance with how closely it approximated the Weberian ideal type of a centralized and rational bureaucracy. According to the classical view, strong states had a bureaucracy staffed by professional civil servants who saw themselves as members of a particular status group. Such groups were premised to share a common ideology, social background, and education, generating a common

⁹⁴ Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, “States and Social Structures: An Agenda for Interdisciplinary Dialogue and Research,” Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, September 1980, 4-6.

esprit de corps that gave the state its own, distinctive set of interests.⁹⁵ Thus, one could claim that “collectivities of state officials have been shown to formulate and pursue their own goals, with their efforts related especially to the order-keeping concerns of states and the linkages of states into international systems of communication and competition.”⁹⁶ However, as the Committee recognized, this view also posed a conceptual difficulty. Following the above principle, the absence of a centralized bureaucracy in nineteenth century United States could lead one to classify it as relatively weak compared to a state like Prussia. Yet such a treatment would miss the ways in which the American polity compensated for this absence—most importantly, the more prominent roles played by the courts and political parties in structuring and administering political processes. Therefore, focusing on the presence or absence of a centralized bureaucracy potentially missed how state capacity could, in some cases, be better explained by a mutually reinforcing relationship between state institutions and other forms of class or interest group organization (for example, industrial confederations).⁹⁷ The Committee thus suggested that classical accounts of bureaucratic autonomy needed to be clarified through empirical and historical specification, and modified in accordance to their variation by context.

It is important to note in this context that “strong” conceptions of bureaucratic autonomy, such as those found in Ellen Kay Trimberger’s *Revolution from Above* were developed in response to the Miliband-Poulantzas debate. Poulantzas had maintained that the personal proximity of the state administrators to the dominant class did not affect the relative autonomy of the capitalist state, as well as that state apparatuses were not independent bases of social power.

⁹⁵ Evans et al., Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, April, 1983, 22.

⁹⁶ Evans et al., Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, April, 1983, 8.

⁹⁷ Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, “States and Social Structures: An Agenda for Interdisciplinary Dialogue and Research,” Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, September 1980, 6.

Against this view, Trimberger repeated the critique initially made by Miliband, arguing that the conflation of state power and class power amounted to a class reductionism by other means, and thereby denied to state institutions that very autonomy they required for the reproduction of the capitalist system. In contrast, she proposed examining how closely those in control of state power were tied to those in control over the means of production and what stake they had in the organization of the economy as a whole.⁹⁸

Whether bureaucrats were relatively insulated from the pressures of social demands by virtue of their career positions, or closely tied to other groups in civil society such as white collar professionals and business elites, raised an even more complex question: in what ways did the state's coherence and autonomy situate it in relation to society? In their contribution to *Bringing the State Back In*, Evans and Rueschemeyer suggested that bureaucratic efficiency could not be analyzed apart from its degree of central coordination or decentralization. As they pointed out, "effective state action requires a minimum of coherence and coordination within and among different state organizations, and that in turn presupposes a minimum of autonomy from forces in civil society."⁹⁹ Yet at the same time, effective state interventions into social and economic life also placed an impetus on lower-level bureaucrats to take a more active and autonomous role, granting them a greater degree of political independence from the central bureaucracy. As a consequence, there emerged a problem of corporate cohesion and coordination, with strong forces in civil society capturing part of the state apparatus for their own purposes, and so treating the state as an arena of social conflict. Thus, there was a basic contradiction at the heart of the state between its role as a corporate actor and as an arena of social conflict: "The antinomies of civil society tend to reproduce themselves within the state, undermining the state's capacity for

⁹⁸ Trimberger, *Revolution from Above*, 7.

⁹⁹ Evans and Rueschemeyer, "The State and Economic Transformation," 55.

coherent corporate action...The state then is in danger of dissipating its own special contribution, which must lie in its ability to operate on the basis of a more general and inclusive vision than is feasible for private actors embedded in the market.”¹⁰⁰

In making this argument, Evans and Rueschemeyer were pointing to an apparent tension between state and civil society that the Committee never fully managed to settle theoretically. While Skocpol wished to make the analytic case for autonomy of the state from society, she had to qualify that this autonomy was not a “fixed structural feature of any governmental system” (as was the case with Nordlinger’s and Poulantzas’ otherwise very different accounts), but a spectrum along which concrete, historical cases varied.¹⁰¹ *Bringing the State Back In* had cautioned that “possibilities for state interventions of given types cannot be derived from some overall level of generalized capacity or ‘state strength.’”¹⁰² At any given moment states could be subject to internal contradictions, variations, and unevenness that prevented an overall accumulation of “strength” or effectiveness. A particular state’s spatial and temporal position within the world system, the legacy of uneven capitalist development, unexpected political or economic crises, or simply a gradual transformation of state/society relations could all affect its capacity for social and economic intervention.¹⁰³

For these reasons, the Committee had to recognize that states needed to be treated not as isolated units “but as actors and structures influencing and influenced by social, cultural, and economic contexts.”¹⁰⁴ As examples, Skocpol pointed to the “relational approaches” put forward by Alfred Stepan and Peter Katzenstein as effectively reintroducing socioeconomic conditions,

¹⁰⁰ Evans and Rueschemeyer, “The State and Economic Transformation,” 60, 56.

¹⁰¹ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research,” 25.

¹⁰² Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In*, 353.

¹⁰³ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Current Research,” 14.

¹⁰⁴ Evans et al., Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, April, 1983, 18.

interests, and conflicts into the studies of the state.¹⁰⁵ However, this qualified view of state capacity also reintroduced an unresolved tension into the Committee's research agenda between the state's autonomy and its dependence upon society. As critics have noted, Skocpol's argument for state autonomy conflated at least two versions: a strong theoretical claim for the autonomy of the state vis-à-vis society and social classes, and a weaker claim for occasional state autonomy in particular historical circumstances.¹⁰⁶ In addition, while one could argue in favor of a mutually-complementary understanding of state and society, frequently the boundary between the two appeared highly uncertain, variable, and contingent. This, in turn, would cast doubt on the "strong" claim for state autonomy through which the Committee distinguished itself from pluralist and neo-Marxist research.

V. Tensions within Neo-Statism

Because the Committee explicitly rejected comprehensive theorizations about "the capitalist state" or "the state in capitalist society," this skepticism about the theoretical usefulness of neo-Marxist approaches such as those of Poulantzas or the capital-logic school led the it to argue for more historically specified accounts of variations among states and their capacities. However, the Committee's goal of furthering inductive historical-comparative research at the expense of building "grand theory" also contributed to a perception that its research agenda was too sprawling and insufficiently theoretical.

As critics pointed out, one consequence of the Committee's pluralistic approach was that the central concept in the enterprise was vague and insufficiently defined. In the reviews of *Bringing the State Back In*, it was noted that "nowhere can one find in this volume a clear

¹⁰⁵ Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research," 36.

¹⁰⁶ Paul Cammack, "Bringing the State Back In?" *British Journal of Political Science* 19 (1989): 261-290.

delineation of what exactly the state is and what it is not,” with its contributors occasionally using the term as a synonym for government or the party in power; or that the absence of a careful delineation of the state meant that “it will remain unclear when research should be state-centered and when it should be society-centered.”¹⁰⁷ According to another account, “not only is there little agreement by those studying the state on what comprises the state, but those studying the state present problematic definitions of their own.”¹⁰⁸ Given the multifaceted and essentially contested character of the state concept, theoretical imprecision also posed the threat of simply reinventing the wheel, as was argued by Gabriel Almond, who suggested that the Committee’s project overstated the novelty of its own contribution at the expense of a previous generation of pluralist scholarship.¹⁰⁹

The varying research interests of its contributors and the planning documents submitted to the SSRC suggest that the Committee was open, at the very least, to two distinct understandings of the state. On one hand, it noted that “conceiving of the state as an institutional entity and a concrete social actor rather than as an abstract category entails looking at the concatenation of organizational subunits that form the state apparatus and at the bureaucratic patterns and legal norms that shape their interaction.”¹¹⁰ In essence, this meant viewing the state through the lens of the goal-oriented activities and interests of its comprising institutions. Since “states may be viewed as organizations through which official collectivities may pursue distinctive goals, realizing them more or less effectively given the available state resources in

¹⁰⁷ Stephen Bornstein, “Review of *Bringing the State Back In*,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 20 (1987): 205-206; Forrest D. Colburn, “Statism, Rationality, and State Centrism,” *Comparative Politics* 20 (1988): 485-482.

¹⁰⁸ Bartholomew H. Sparrow, “Going Beyond the State?” *American Political Science Review* 86 (1992): 1011.

¹⁰⁹ Almond, “The Return to the State.”

¹¹⁰ Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, “States and Social Structures: An Agenda for Interdisciplinary Dialogue and Research,” Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, September 1980, 6.

relation to social settings,” studying the state as a concrete social actor required “dissecting state strategies, policies, their possibilities for implementation, and the resulting sociopolitical changes.”¹¹¹ This account closely mirrors the “strong” case for state autonomy made by Skocpol in *States and Social Revolutions*, and she maintained that it was especially this view of the state as a social actor capable of formulating and implementing distinctive goals toward political and socioeconomic change that had heretofore been neglected by pluralists and neo-Marxists alike.

Skocpol also identified a second, less common but “perhaps even more important” and “entirely complementary” approach: the state not as a social actor but rather as “configurations of organization and action that influence the meanings and methods of politics for all groups and classes in society.”¹¹² The organizational configurations of states and their overall patterns of activity “affect political culture, encourage some kinds of group formation and collective political actions (and discourage others), and make possible the raising of certain political issues (but not others).” In this case, instead of dissecting state strategies and policies, the investigator would look “more macroscopically at the ways in which the structures and activities of states unintentionally influence the formation of groups and the political capacities, ideas, and demands of various sectors of society.” Initially, at Mt. Kisco Skocpol had noted how works by Offe and Therborn used this perspective to examine how advanced capitalist societies had successfully integrated the working class into the welfare state and the political and economic reproduction of the capitalist order at large (however, she subsequently called this approach “Tocquevillian” rather than neo-Marxist in the revised version published in *Bringing the State Back In*).

While these approaches differed in terms of seeing the state as an independent or a dependent variable, underlying both views was an organizational or institutional conception in

¹¹¹ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research,” 37; “Bringing the State Back In: Current Research,” 21.

¹¹² Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Current Research,” 21, 28.

which the state was a structure of apparatuses with a locus of power. In fact, this way of thinking was often reflected in the Committee's language when analytically parsing apart the state from society. As was stated in their initial proposal to the SSRC, "If we are to analyze the relation between the state and the larger social structure of which it is a part, the structures that constitute the state must be set off from other societal relations."¹¹³ Yet despite referring to the state as a structure or an organizational configuration, the Committee's suspicion of grand theory and emphasis on historical and empirical specification prevented them from adopting an unambiguously structural paradigm.

This was made evident by the Committee's research agenda maintaining that by "state structure" was meant not only "an organizational analysis of the apparatus of governance" but also "the social position of the individuals who staff that apparatus, both in terms of their social origins and their career patterns."¹¹⁴ To understand states as goal-oriented social actors meant moving beyond the functionalist view of institutions as impersonal reproducers of the social order. As Skocpol pointed out, behind states' abilities to formulate and pursue their own goals were "organizationally coherent collectivities of state officials, especially collectivities of career officials relatively insulated from ties to socioeconomic interests;" these state managers were the key institutional actors through which state policies were proposed and implemented, whether by virtue of being linked into transnational structures and international flows of communication, by maintaining social control through reform or repression, or by launching transformative public

¹¹³ Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, "States and Social Structures: An Agenda for Interdisciplinary Dialogue and Research," Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, September 1980, 4.

¹¹⁴ Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, Memorandum regarding the States and Social Structures Project, July 14, 1982.

policies in times of crisis.¹¹⁵ What needed to be examined was how “collectivities of state officials have been shown to formulate and pursue their own goals, with their efforts related specially to the order-keeping concerns of states and to the linkages of states into international systems of communication and competition.”¹¹⁶ Consequently, studying state policies required analyzing its bureaucratic structures, and “looking at the state as a set of individual positions whose incumbents are tied by kinship, social affiliations and career patterns both to other parts of the state apparatus and to particular groups and institutions outside.”¹¹⁷

Therefore, to the extent that there was an agreement on a basic set of assumptions, the Committee’s theoretical outlook on the state sat uneasily between at least three analytic tendencies: 1) the state as a potentially autonomous and cohesive “social actor”; 2) the state as an interconnection of “organizational subunits” that channeled and mediated social processes; and 3) the state as a set of individual positions or organized collectivities with potential ideological and communal ties to society. If taken as a starting premise, each approach could lead to distinct understandings of the state that were not necessarily as compatible as the Committee envisioned. In particular, it is not clear that the treatment of the state as an internally cohesive social actor is seamlessly compatible with the notion of the state as a collectivity of bureaucratic officials, nor with the notion of the state as a set of organizational subunits that has a structuring effect on society.

Consider for a moment the first dichotomy: the state as a potentially autonomous, cohesive social actor versus the state as an apparatus composed of individual positions. Among

¹¹⁵ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research,” 15.

¹¹⁶ Evans et al., Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, April, 1983, 8.

¹¹⁷ Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, “States and Social Structures: An Agenda for Interdisciplinary Dialogue and Research,” Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, September 1980, 4.

the neo-statist revival of the time, the latter case was made by Nordlinger in his book *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State*. By the state concept Nordlinger simply meant “all those individuals who occupy offices that authorize them, and them alone, to make and apply decisions that are binding upon any and all segments of society.”¹¹⁸ Similar to Poulantzas, who argued that the “structuralism” of mainstream social science transformed the state into an anthropomorphic subject, Nordlinger maintained that treating the state in terms of institutions and their patterns of interaction reified the state into a subject that had its own preferences.¹¹⁹ But in contrast to Poulantzas, Nordlinger took the opposite route in identifying state preferences with the amalgamated preferences of the most influential public officials. As a result, the “state will” could not be assumed to be monolithic—nor perhaps assumed to exist at all.¹²⁰

For Skocpol, Nordlinger had essentially lapsed into a form of neo-pluralist analysis, in simply transferring the logic of pluralism from the social sphere to that of government. By focusing on the preferences of public officials, Nordlinger’s analysis lacked “powerful social-structural explanations of variation in state autonomy” and its consequences for policy-implementation.¹²¹ In contrast to this view, Skocpol at times wrote of the state as an impersonal, structurally-constrained force, calling it an “autonomous structure—a structure with a logic and interests of its own not necessarily equivalent to, or fused with, the interests of the dominant class in society or the full set of member groups in the polity.”¹²² Thus, we may suppose that Skocpol’s understanding of the state as an interconnected structure of administrative and

¹¹⁸ Nordlinger, *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State*, 11.

¹¹⁹ See Poulantzas, “The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau,” 308.

¹²⁰ Nordlinger, *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State*, 15; Nordlinger, “The Return to the State: Critiques,” *American Political Science Review* 82 (1988): 882.

¹²¹ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research,” 10.

¹²² Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 27.

coercive organizations with the capacity to formulate and implement distinctive goals from those of the dominant social classes was a more analytically versatile and insightful starting point.

Yet it is not clear that this view of the state as a potentially autonomous social actor avoided the same pitfall of simply using “the state” as a conceptual stand-in for elite decision-making within institutions. In response to observations that *Bringing the State Back In* reified the state, Skocpol had later suggested that it could be conceived of as an organization defined by its officials being “part of the same overall apparatus of authority relations and resource flows.”¹²³ This formulation is close to stating that the operations of political institutions are characterized by the exercise of power by people in strategic positions (“state managers”). But if in fact the institutions and the individuals acting through them were the real subjects of analysis, it becomes difficult to discern precisely what additional insights could be gained from invoking the state as an analytic concept.

The Committee had suggested that moving beyond abstract neo-Marxist postulations about the state required probing the “internal complexities” and “systemic fault lines” of state structures—“yet without going to the extreme of treating them simply as disconnected collections of competing agencies.”¹²⁴ Implicit in the use of the state concept was the belief that it represented a constellation of institutions which were held together by an underlying logic. However, it is apparent there was a degree of slippage and vacillation between the structural view of the state as a unitary actor (especially vis-à-vis “society”), and one that sought to clarify the state’s internal processes and operations in a more empirical manner. The conception of the state as a potentially autonomous actor begged the question as to the origins of the aforementioned “bureaucratic patterns” and “legal norms” that gave it its underlying

¹²³ Interview with Skocpol, *Passion, Craft and Method in Comparative Politics*, 675-676.

¹²⁴ Evans et al., Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, April, 1983, 16.

organizational unity or coherence to be called a “state.” If, as Barrow summarizes, the empirical referent for the autonomous state was the existence of “leading elites [who] are career officials...who develop a sense of ideological purpose which legitimates the desirability of using the state to act against the dominant class,” the emphasis was shifted onto the motivations and interests of state managers and their networks rather than to the state as such.¹²⁵ But, in turn, if the state’s cohesion could ultimately be attributed to a common *esprit de corps* or ideology shared by state managers, one risked going back down the path of either pluralism or elite-theory and away from the promised insights of a state-centric research agenda.

Here we can note how this dilemma was anticipated by the Miliband-Poulantzas debate. Poulantzas had argued that Miliband’s account of the state implicitly depended on external, societal factors to provide it with an underlying cohesive unity—namely the common ideology and class background shared by the state personnel and the capitalist class. For by concentrating on the social origins and ties of political elites, Miliband came dangerously close to the instrumentalist position, and missed the degree to which the state was a *capitalist* state by virtue of its location within the capitalist mode of production. And in later arguing for a view of the state as a social relation, Poulantzas wrote of the “pseudo-dilemma” that came about as a result of seeing state and class as intrinsic entities “external” to each other; for one either saw the state as a thing, instrument, or apparatus to be “used” by the representatives of the economically dominant class, or it was a subject (a view derived from Hegel and Weber) that possessed absolute autonomy and was its own repository of power.¹²⁶ Therefore, seeking the origins of a given state policy led to a theoretical impasse. For either the state entity needed to be further parceled apart into the actions and interests of state managers, at which point the state concept

¹²⁵ Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State*, 130.

¹²⁶ Poulantzas, “The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau,” 308.

became analytically redundant, or one needed to assume the existence of an almost metaphysical “state will” that granted it a subjectivity and an overarching purpose, at the risk of reifying a conceptual abstraction into an actually existing entity.¹²⁷

Turning to the second dichotomy—the state as a cohesive social actor contrasted to the state as “configurations of organization and action” that influence how social processes are channeled into the political arena—we can notice another tension, this time having to do with the proximity of the state to society. In a broad sense, the Committee postulated that “the shape and politicization of fundamental class, regional, ethnic, or religious cleavages appear to be strongly influenced by processes of state building, by the structure of administrative and representative institutions, and by the co-optive or repressive policies of political authorities.”¹²⁸ For Skocpol, the cross-nationally and historically varying state structures “powerfully shape and limit state interventions in the economy, and they determine the ways in which class interests and conflicts get organized into (or out of politics) in a given time and place.”¹²⁹ And as she later put it, “the political expression of class interests and conflicts is never automatic or economically determined,” but instead “depends on the capacities classes have for achieving consciousness, organization, and representation.”¹³⁰ To become salient political factors, these latent class conflicts needed to be channeled and articulated through state (and semi-private) institutions, such as corporate boards, administrative and bureaucratic agencies, and political parties.

In theory, this view of the state as a configuration of subunits avoided the previous difficulties involved with treating it as an autonomous and purposive entity. Focusing on the way

¹²⁷ See Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*, 139-141.

¹²⁸ Evans et al., Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures, April, 1983, 56.

¹²⁹ Skocpol, “Political Response to Capitalist Crisis,” 200.

¹³⁰ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Current Research,” 25. However, as was pointed out by Cammack, this is also precisely the view of class capacity found in Marx.

in which a state's organizational structure channeled societal interests into politics did not require one to assume that there was an underlying coherence and unity (or "will") to the state's actions. Instead, the focus was on the more passive role that existing institutional arrangements and past historical legacies played in delimiting the scope, influence, and collective action of classes, trade unions, interest groups, and other social forces. Thus, one could potentially trace the origins of these patterns of interaction and their outcomes by examining factors such as historical path dependence, the state's place within the capitalist world system, or the unintended consequences of consciously-pursued policies in another sphere of state activity.

Yet it was difficult to square this latter view with Skocpol's original "strong" claim for state autonomy and independence from society. Recall her contention that for neo-Marxists "states are inherently shaped by classes or class struggles and function to preserve and expand modes of production."¹³¹ In the paper presented at Mt. Kisco, Skocpol had opened with a brief discussion of Therborn's book *What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules?* using it to illustrate how neo-Marxist accounts concerned with state structures still rejected "state autonomy" as a "misleadingly 'subjectivist' concept."¹³² In that work, Therborn had indeed rejected the Weberian problematic, which tended to see the state as a "goal-oriented subject within an environment;" instead, he claimed that Marxists "view the state as a separate material institution, functioning as the nodal point of the relations of power within society"—in other words, as a set of apparatuses permeated by societal processes, and in particular the class struggle.¹³³ Despite the apparent proximity of Therborn's view to the second conception of the state outlined by

¹³¹ Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In: Current Research," 5.

¹³² Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research," 11-12.

¹³³ Therborn, *What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules?* 37, 132.

Skocpol, accounts such as these still underemphasized how state organizations could either actively “select” or unintentionally channel certain social processes into policy outcomes.

Here too, on the issue of whether the state was a distinct source of power, the Miliband-Poulantzas debate had anticipated and set the parameters of possible stances taken by the Committee. As Miliband had argued at the time, the distinction between class power and state power was fundamental for understanding the state’s role in capitalist society and its ability to perpetuate the interests of the dominant class. Thus, Miliband emphasized state power as a distinct but necessary component of class rule; leading Poulantzas to suggest he was bringing neo-Weberian or elite-theoretical conceptions of the state through the back door. In contrast, Poulantzas initially suggested that the state was a structure that maintained the cohesion of a social formation, and subsequently that it was a condensation of a relation of power between struggling classes. In both cases, Poulantzas’ conclusion was that “by State power one can only mean the power of certain classes to whose interests the State corresponds.”¹³⁴ As their debate made apparent, emphasizing the state as an independent source of power and attributing state autonomy to state power meant asserting the primacy of the bureaucracy vis-à-vis the class struggle. So long as the discussion of the relative autonomy of the state referred to the class struggle, whatever differences there may have been among its various institutions could be seen as a functional separation of an underlying unity, and not a serious contradiction in the state apparatus as a whole.¹³⁵ For that reason, neo-Marxist scholarship following the debate tended to see the state as having no power of its own, but rather as a set of apparatuses where social or class power was concentrated and exercised.

¹³⁴ See Poulantzas, “The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau,” 281.

¹³⁵ Frank Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 126-128.

Yet for the purposes of the Committee's research agenda, the view of states as a "society-shaping institutional structures" also undercut the distinctive emphasis on the potential autonomy of the state that was put forward in the prior conception of the state as a collectivity of state managers or a cohesive social actor.¹³⁶ As we saw, one of the defining features of state autonomy was the capacities of state institutions to mediate class conflict while remaining relatively impervious to it. According to this view, the state apparatus was a repository of power distinct from society and had no inherent class character. For Skocpol, states "have their own organizational forms and logics, which in turn influence politics not only in class-biased ways but also in ways equally relevant (or irrelevant) for all classes."¹³⁷ Meanwhile, for Block, "state power is *sui generis*, not reducible to class power."¹³⁸ However, in its conception of the state as a bureaucratic, institutional apparatus analytically distinct from society and the class struggle, this view downplayed the impact that social forces could have on altering or framing state policy, as well as the extent to which they could traverse or permeate the state apparatuses. In their "strong" formulation, the neo-statist approaches overemphasized the ability of states to manage society, and saw politics primarily as a process of bureaucratic conflict within the state, rather than as emerging from conflicting social forces.¹³⁹ And, in turn, this view sat uneasily with a conception of the state as a configuration of organizational subunits where autonomy from "society" was less clearly defined, and where state institutions were more permeable to social interests.

Therefore, the theoretical dilemmas raised by the Committee's dual conception of the state—as a cohesive social actor and as an organizational structure—reproduced the Miliband-Poulantzas debate and the dichotomy of instrumentalism and structuralism that it gave rise to.

¹³⁶ Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In: Current Research," 6.

¹³⁷ Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research," 41.

¹³⁸ Fred Block, "Beyond Relative Autonomy," in *Revising State Theory*, 84.

¹³⁹ Albo and Jensen "A Contested Concept: The Relative Autonomy of the State," 183.

While *Bringing the State Back In* was published in 1985 and the project was in gestation for the previous five years, its theoretical paradigm can best be understood as introducing a Weberian corrective in an attempted break with the dichotomy. As we have seen, at the heart of the neo-statist turn was a critique of the abstract structuralism of Poulantzas, and the tendency of instrumentalist or corporate liberal accounts to identify the origin of state policies with the interests of the capitalist class. At the same time, Skocpol identified both approaches as essentially identical positions when it came to their class reductionism, since neither could explain how or why state institutions and actors could act against the basic interests of the dominant class.¹⁴⁰

Skocpol's reproduction of this binary neglected its role as part of a polemic internal to Marxist theory. As a frequent target of "sophisticated" Marxists, Domhoff has argued that the Miliband-Poulantzas debate not only distorted Miliband's (and by proxy, C. Wright Mills') views of the state, but also opened the floodgates to a series of critiques that hypostatized an unhelpful instrumentalist-structuralist binary that emerged as a consequence of the debate.¹⁴¹ Earlier, at the Mt. Kisco conference, Therborn observed that scholars like Pierre Birnbaum and Skocpol had "kept alive instrumentalism as an indispensable whipping boy" for their own "subjectivist" understandings of the state as an actor in its own right. In treating class relations as being materially condensed in the state, Therborn had proposed moving beyond this debate toward an inquiry into how state structures affect social and political relations, and arguing for an understanding of class agency that treated state managers neither as the political tools of an

¹⁴⁰ Cammack, "Statism, New Institutionalism, and Marxism," 150.

¹⁴¹ See Domhoff, "Corporate-Liberal Theory and the Social Security Act."

economically dominant class nor as autonomous actors, but as political actors within the matrix of existing class relations.¹⁴²

Meanwhile, in a 1983 piece titled “State Power and Class Interests” Miliband engaged with the contemporary neo-statist revival in mainstream political science. Along with noting that works such as Nordlinger’s tended to ignore the state’s capitalist context, Miliband situated himself between Poulantzas and Therborn, on one side, whom he saw as dissolving state power into class power, and on the other side, the “state for itself” approaches of Skocpol, Trimberger, and Krasner, who adeptly captured the importance and irreducibility of state organizations for social transformations, but wrongly insisted that Marxist frameworks could not account for fundamental conflicts of interest between the state and dominant classes.¹⁴³ Thus, Miliband maintained the relationship between the dominant class and the state in advanced capitalist societies should be seen as one of a partnership between two distinct and separate, but related, forces. While Miliband’s formulations still gave rise to terminological confusions, such as his identifying the state with “the people who run it” or “the people who are in charge of the decision-making power,” he was also aware of the tension between state autonomy and class interests, as well as of the structural determinants of state policy.¹⁴⁴

Miliband’s attempt to strike a theoretical balance between these positions reflected the modification of his views since *The State in Capitalist Society*. In his subsequent *Marxism and Politics* he not only put forward a critique of both the instrumentalist and “elite theory” positions

¹⁴² Therborn nevertheless agreed with Skocpol on the importance of integrating the state’s external relations into this analysis, in addition to paying closer attention to the various political practices through which state institutions and social forces were drawn into a mutually-affecting relationship. See Göran Therborn, “Structures of State, Forms of Politics: The Formation of a Bourgeois-Bureaucratic State in Sweden and Its Political Effects,” 1, Paper prepared for Mt. Kisco Conference, Folder 1323, Box 219, Series I, Social Science Research Council 19, the Rockefeller Center Archive.

¹⁴³ Ralph Miliband, “State Power and Class Interests,” *New Left Review* 1/138 (March-April 1983): 57-68.

¹⁴⁴ Miliband, “State Power and Class Interests,” 60, 62.

that he was initially associated with, but also admitted his previous neglect of the role that economic structures played in determining state autonomy. Neither instrumentalist nor structuralist approaches were capable of explaining how the state acted on behalf of the ruling class but not necessarily at its behest. As he wrote, the state in capitalist society “enjoys a high degree of autonomy and independence in the manner of its operation as a class state, and indeed *must* have that high degree of autonomy and independence if it is to act as a class state.”¹⁴⁵ This relative autonomy meant a “degree of freedom which the state (normally meaning in this context the executive power) has in determining how best to serve what those who hold power conceive to be the ‘national interest,’ and which in fact involves the service of the interests of the ruling class.”¹⁴⁶ However, despite these clarifications, Skocpol had characterized *Marxism and Politics* as a work that stressed the freedom of choice for political leaders and underemphasized the structural underpinnings of state autonomy. This was a rather paradoxical reading, since in the wake of his debate with Poulantzas, Miliband admitted that *The State in Capitalist Society* suffered from an underdeveloped conception of structural-economic constraints on the capitalist state, which he then sought to rectify. Skocpol’s reading of these two texts thus misattributed to the other what critics saw as each one’s biggest flaws.¹⁴⁷

Lastly, it is also important to mention that when it came to the discussion of Poulantzas among the statist revival in political science, much of the discussion focused on his earlier works, the debate with Miliband, and up through *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*. The tension that emerged in *Political Power and Social Classes* between the state as the unifying nodal point of a social formation and as the matrix that appropriated and directed the class struggle had led

¹⁴⁵ Miliband, *Marxism and Politics*, 74.

¹⁴⁶ Miliband, *Marxism and Politics*, 83.

¹⁴⁷ Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In: False Leads and Promising Starts in Current Theories and Research*, 54.

Poulantzas to refine this position in subsequent works like *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* and *State, Power, Socialism*. Especially in the latter, Poulantzas' discussion of the importance of knowledge production to the state project, of territoriality and temporality as two key components of the state-capital nexus, and his engagement with Foucault regarding the micro-processes of social power all indicated how his thinking had developed since the publication of *Political Power and Social Classes*. Thus, at the time that Poulantzas had revised his view to conceive of the state in a relational sense, as a matrix of power between different social forces, the Committee was taking the opposite route in asserting the autonomy of the state from the class struggle and society as a whole.

Therefore, the Committee's focus on the earlier stage in the debate minimized the significance of these later intellectual shifts by Miliband and Poulantzas. The inconclusive outcome of the Miliband-Poulantzas debate led the Committee to largely ignore its subsequent nuances and modifications. This lent to the conception of the state within its research agenda a theoretically underspecified character, which bracketed away the meta-theoretical debates surrounding the theorization of the capitalist state.¹⁴⁸ It also resulted in the deployment of more Weberian conceptions of bureaucracy, status, and state power to fill in the gaps, in order to provide a definition that was more conducive to social scientific research by treating the state not as a conceptual abstraction but as a tangible entity.

It was precisely because of this theoretical gap when it came to developing an adequate conception of the state that the Committee also needed to emphasize the distinction between state and society, despite the analytical difficulties involved in delimiting these two realms. While seeking to maintain a relational dynamic between state and society, the Committee heavily weighed the state and maintained that one could avoid relapsing into the society-oriented

¹⁴⁸ See Theda Skocpol, "The Dead End of Metatheory," *Contemporary Sociology* 16 (1987): 10-12.

frameworks of pluralism or Marxism only by distinguishing the state from society. The central argument of *Bringing the State Back In* insisted on the need for a break with prior social scientific theorizing which overlooked the state, and in its rejection of “grand theory,” the Committee identified Marxism with functionalism. The notion of state autonomy around which much of the research agenda revolved was a way of explaining historical developments through explicitly political factors, and of theoretically reframing of the very role of class in relation to political institutions. The class struggle was not only de-emphasized as the primary causal force of societal development, but was almost entirely excluded from the conception of the state. As Cammack noted, “First social classes are dissolved into ‘society’, then this undifferentiated ‘society’ is counter-posed to ‘the state.’ As a consequence, the idea that the state is differentially penetrated by conflicting classes, and incorporates, reflects and affects the struggle between them, becomes literally unthinkable.”¹⁴⁹

Therefore, given the inherent conceptual and methodological ambiguities involved in defining the state, the distinction of state from society provided it with the internal coherence that it otherwise lacked. As Bartelson writes, “in order for the state to be intelligible as an agent in its own right, a firm line of demarcation must be drawn between the state proper and the society upon which it is in some sense dependent.”¹⁵⁰ The state presupposed its obverse—civil society—against which its capacities, unity, and potential autonomy were defined and evaluated. Yet this theoretical move implied that state and society were mutually exclusive, self-determining, and available to be studied in themselves, in effect reifying what Jessop has called “emergent, partial, unstable, and variable distinctions.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Cammack, “Review Article: Bringing the State Back In,” 289.

¹⁵⁰ Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*, 139.

¹⁵¹ Bob Jessop, “Bringing the State Back in (Yet Again): Reviews, Revisions, Rejections, and Redirections,” *International Review of Sociology* 11 (2001): 149-173.

VI. The Neo-Statist Legacy

Bringing the State Back In can be seen as the most coherent expression of the neo-statist research agenda. Retrospective accounts of this project differ among its participants. According to Katznelson, it was “intended as no less than a Kuhnian paradigm shift.”¹⁵² In contrast, Skocpol has suggested that the Committee was “not trying to create a subdiscipline,” but rather “trying to crystallize an agenda of questions and lines of analysis that were exciting and fruitful across different substantive literatures.”¹⁵³ Despite this seemingly modest goal, the Committee’s legacy in American political science was magnified by its explicit reintroduction of the state as a variable, which opened the door for a series of new research agendas centered on the relationship between the state and society.

With each iteration of state-oriented research, more attention came to be paid to the nuances and challenges of studying the state in relation to society. As we saw, the first wave represented by the efforts of the Committee, emphasized the state as an autonomous agent with its own set of interests that did not necessarily reflect those of society, swinging the pendulum almost entirely in the direction of state autonomy vis-à-vis society. Following that, contributions by Peter Katzenstein, Alfred Stepan, Peter Evans, and Dietrich Rueschemeyer sought to position the strong, autonomous state in relation to the specific socioeconomic and sociocultural contexts in which it was embedded. And later iterations of political science research on state-society relations in the 1990s became more concerned with the mutual determination and constitution of state and society.¹⁵⁴ Thus, for scholars like Joel Migdal, one of the central paradoxes of the modern state has been its constant struggle to disembed itself from society, and its representation

¹⁵² Katznelson, “The State to the Rescue? Political Science and History Reconnect,” 729.

¹⁵³ Interview with Skocpol, *Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics*, 700.

¹⁵⁴ See Barkey and Parikh, “Comparative Perspectives on the State.”

of itself as a source of authority above society and yet dependent upon it.¹⁵⁵ In all three cases, the analytic distinction between state and society raised the same questions that the neo-Marxist literature of the 1970s grappled with but was unable to definitively resolve. In response to this quandary, Timothy Mitchell's contribution during the early 1990s had pushed this dialogue in an even more radical direction, arguing from a neo-Foucauldian perspective that the state-society boundary was itself a constantly negotiated network of institutional mechanisms.¹⁵⁶

While the movement to "bring the state back in" thus had an important and notable effect on the research agendas of political scientists (not least of all in the rise of the "new institutionalism"), it is also important to point to the Committee's unintentional effects.¹⁵⁷ Crucially, the neo-statist turn involved not merely the reintroduction of a foundational concept for political science, but in the process, a reinterpretation of the discipline's past. It prompted a series of meta-theoretical and historical debates during the late 1980s and 1990s about the role of the state concept within the discipline, which also coincided with a revival of interest in the disciplinary history of political science as such.¹⁵⁸

While the Committee was conceived as a self-consciously "realist" and relatively atheoretical enterprise, it presented its research agenda as the recovery of the forgotten statist

¹⁵⁵ Joel Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 250-262. In a recent critical evaluation of the neo-statist movement, William Novak has suggested that the connotation of state autonomy is part of a legacy of anthropomorphism in state theory, asking "what exactly is 'autonomy' in complex and increasingly interdependent modern economies, societies, and polities?" See Novak, "Conclusion: The Concept of the State in American History" in *Boundaries of the State in U.S. History*, 329

¹⁵⁶ Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics," *American Political Science Review* 85 (1991): 77-96.

¹⁵⁷ For a summary of new institutionalism, see Margaret Levi, "The State of the Study of the State." In Katznelson and Milner, eds. *The State of the Discipline*, 33-55

¹⁵⁸ See especially Almond, "The Return to the State"; Eric Nordlinger, Theodore Lowi, and Sergio Fabbrini, "The Return to the State: Critiques" *American Political Science Review* 82 (1988): 875-901; Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State"; and John Bendix, Bertell Ollman, Bartholomew H. Sparrow, and Timothy P. Mitchell, "Going Beyond the State?" *American Political Science Review* 86 (1992): 1007-1021.

legacy previously held by the discipline but which, by the 1950s-60s, had been eroded under the twin pressures of pluralism and structural-functionalism. Although it distinguished between its own approach and the “dry and dusty legal-formalist studies of nationally particular constitutional principles” that still characterized political science at the turn of the century, it clearly drew inspiration from the continental European tradition of *Staatswissenschaft* and its heirs like Max Weber and Otto Hintze.¹⁵⁹ Through its attempted revival of nineteenth century conceptions of the state, the Committee was essentially challenging the path taken by American social science from World War I up through what Katznelson has called the “political studies Enlightenment” of the post-World War II era.

This reinterpretation of the discipline’s past by the Committee had led figures like Lowi to issue correctives pointing out the importance of institutional questions for the previous generation of political science literature.¹⁶⁰ For Lowi, the state was never really out, but “only overshadowed,” as political scientists between the 1930s-50s were interested in political institutions and the concept was central to the “Cornell school” of political science during the early 1970s.¹⁶¹ Consequently, Lowi saw the New Left’s critique of pluralism and structural functionalism that emerged in the late-1960s less than a novel intervention in its own right and more as the continuation of the insights initially advanced by C. Wright Mills. More recently, Katznelson has characterized the neo-statist project as falling short of its goals, especially in comparison with the groundbreaking work on the state in the immediate post-World War I period. In retrospect, Katznelson has argued that the neo-statist revival was based on an unfounded belief in the normative desirability of strong, effective states without a corresponding awareness

¹⁵⁹ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Current Research,” 4.

¹⁶⁰ According to Ellis (“Pluralist Political Science & ‘The State’”: “Distinguishing between Autonomy & Coherence”), “Demonstrating the autonomy of public officials, something that has never been denied by mainstream pluralist political science, is insufficient to compel adopting the locution of ‘the state.’”

¹⁶¹ Lowi, “The Return to the State: Critiques,” 885.

of their potential dangers. For without the destructive experience of World War I in its immediate rear view, the Committee had been too credulous in assuming the positive effects that state strength had on human welfare and too neglectful of the American liberal-democratic tradition (represented in pluralist scholarship) and its normative goals of protecting citizens from the encroachment of totalitarian states.¹⁶²

Critical observations such as these raise questions about the manner in which new social scientific research agendas are constructed and justified. It may be considered a paradox that the discipline's revival of interest in the state occurred in the 1980s, at the very time that "the structural power of capital and the strategic and ideological reach of capitalist classes has become perhaps never more nakedly visible."¹⁶³ Yet the Committee was very much a product of its time, and the normative questions underneath the research agenda were clearly motivated by a concern with the place and role of the state in the aftermath of the late-1970s. With the welfare states of the advanced industrial democracies having undergone a systemic crisis and the exuberance of the radical 1960s given way to political pessimism, interest grew in the state as a political actor and its capacities to continue meeting popular demands in the face of a pending socio-economic transformation and a deficit of democratic legitimacy. In light of the challenges that reality posed to existing theories, the state and social structures were reintroduced as important variables through which macro-historical research about political transformations of could be conducted.

In that sense, the proponents of this new research agenda had a strong interest in arguing for the novelty of their project, which, while not entirely accurate, appealed to sensibilities as a pressing and innovative undertaking at the time. As Skocpol had written, "between the 1950s and

¹⁶² Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment*, 115-116.

¹⁶³ Panitch, "The Impoverishment of State Theory," in *Paradigm Lost*, 92.

the 1980s, the implicit world views embodied in both static and developmentalist versions of structural functionalism were rendered less meaningful by the reverberations of political conflicts inside the United States and across the globe. Economic-determinist and linear evolutionist readings of Marxism also lost any appeal they once held for most Western intellectuals.”¹⁶⁴ Rather than concurring with earlier neo-Marxists that the state was the source of stability for the capitalist mode of production and a political object toward which social struggles could be directed, the neo-statist turn was motivated by a different set of concerns. Responding to the challenges of this period, the Committee set before itself the task of investigating how the autonomy of political institutions from the economically dominant classes and interest groups within society could potentially mitigate the crisis of the Keynesian welfare state.

Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol proclaimed a stance of value neutrality when it came to this research agenda. As they wrote, “better understanding of the roots and consequences of state actions and capacities must be developed, free of automatic activations of visions about what states ought to do or ought not to do.” Yet they also recognized that there was a normative component to this work, such as the necessity to “avoid misguided attempts at expanding state interventions” and in emphasizing that “studying state action should not entail either glorifying state power or overestimating its efficacy.” In that respect, the neo-statist approach can be characterized as a social democratic response to existing critiques of the state from the ideological left and right—those “old ideological encrustations” that obscured a rigorous, empirical analysis of state actions and capacities in the present. Against the nascent ideology of the neoliberal right, it pointed to the historical emergence of successful welfare systems and the ongoing role that the state played in fostering the growth and prosperity of national economies;

¹⁶⁴ Skocpol, *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*, 3.

against the left it raised the specter of the collective disasters that followed from exclusively statist “solutions” to policy questions.¹⁶⁵

This reinterpretation of the discipline’s past in order to make an argument about the present in turn also affected the legacy of Marxist political theory in America. The neo-Marxist debates about the capitalist state had developed into a pluralistic set of theories by the early 1980s. Subsequently, the Committee acted as the as the medium through which Marxist theories and themes were integrated into the into the discipline’s mainstream and introduced to subsequent generations of scholars. Yet while its summary and critique of the neo-Marxist debates became an important touchstone for later state-centric research, one of its lasting effects was to cement the image of Marxism as a theoretical dead end, thereby making it more easily subsumable within its own narrative of the discipline’s trajectory.¹⁶⁶

Therefore, in considering the lasting impact of the Committee on States and Social Structures, we must concentrate both on its generating of new pathways for subsequent state-oriented research in political science, and its redefinition of the discipline’s past vis-à-vis its own research agenda. In both cases, neo-Marxist debates about the capitalist state played a formative role, having by that point themselves become a discursive object that could be referred to and evaluated. Their underlying presence within the neo-statist scholarship of the late 1970s-1980s can best be understood as a body of scholarship that facilitated the introduction and opening of new themes and research questions within political science; yet which, due to theoretical incompatibility and institutional bias, became a stepping stone toward a different research agenda that reintegrated and redefined it to its own purposes.

¹⁶⁵ Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, “On the Road toward a More Adequate Understanding of the State,” in *Bringing the State Back In*, 364-365.

¹⁶⁶ See Waddell, “When the Past is Not Prologue;” Cammack, “Statism, New Institutionalism, and Marxism.”

Chapter Four: Transitions from Authoritarianism (and Beyond)

“In the contemporary world, these two transitions—to political democracy and to socialism—are simultaneously on the agenda.” – O’Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, 1986

“The state has been there all along. Who needs to bring it back in? Only an American could write something like that.” – Philippe Schmitter, Interview in *Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics*, 2002

“The state is everywhere and nowhere.” – Guillermo O’Donnell, *Democracy, Agency, and the State*, 2010

The revival of interest in the state that took place during the 1970s-1980s was an intellectual development specific to American political science, and therefore to the American national context. The relative stability and conservative consensus of the Cold War political scene had led to a “forgetting” of the state in American political science, which in turn allowed it to be “brought back in” with much fanfare. In contrast, the state and political power had always remained a central intellectual and practical question for students of politics in Europe and Latin America. The destructive experiences of fascism and authoritarianism in the first half of the twentieth century and the relative prominence of communist and socialist movements in contrast to the U.S. reinforced the importance of the state as a concept for understanding systemic and structural political phenomena like revolution, regime change, and democratization.

The concern with regime change and democratization originated with postwar modernization theory; yet it took a more distinctive turn within comparative politics from the late 1970s onward.¹ Arguably the most influential work of political science scholarship on comparative democratization that began to flourish during the 1980s-1990s was the collaborative

¹ See James Mahoney, “Strategies of Causal Assessment in Comparative Historical Analysis,” in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, ed. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 131-174.

research project *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*. Organized through the Latin American Program of the Woodrow Wilson Center between 1979-1981 and published as a four-volume edited collection in 1986, *Transitions* was spearheaded by Guillermo O'Donnell (of the Centro de Estudios de Estado y Sociedad in Buenos Aires), Philippe C. Schmitter (of the University of Chicago), and Laurence Whitehead (of Oxford University). Bringing together an international group of renowned scholars from Latin America, Europe, and the United States, the project's primary goal was to provide a comparative perspective on the transitions from military to civilian rule that occurred in the mid to late-1970s in Southern Europe and Latin America. Like its contemporary, the Committee on States and Social Structures that was organized through the Social Science Research Council, the sponsoring of *Transitions* by the Woodrow Wilson Center was an example of the institutionalization of a new trajectory in social scientific research.² Yet the project was also quite normative in its mission. In the words of Abraham Lowenthal, the director of the Latin American Program, it was united by "its analytic and normative focus on the prospects of building democratic or polyarchic polities in the wake of an authoritarian transition."³

In this chapter, I place this research agenda on transitions from dictatorship to liberal democracy that emerged at the tail end of the 1970s into dialogue with concurrent Marxist debates about transitions from capitalism to socialism, especially as articulated in the debates

² See in particular Nicolas Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers*. Aside from their overlapping timelines, the Committee and *Transitions* shared two contributors—Albert Hirschman and Alfred Stepan. While Guillermo O'Donnell was not ultimately involved with the Committee, he was consulted by Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, and included on the initial program of the Mt. Kisco conference before withdrawing. See Peter Evans and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Letter to Richard Fagen, Hans Jürgen Puhle, and Guillermo O'Donnell, November 19, 1980 (Folder 3802, Box 301, Series I); and Guillermo O'Donnell, Letter to Peter B. Evans, October 11, 1982 (Folder 1325, Box 220, Series I). Both at Social Science Research Council 19, the Rockefeller Archive Center.

³ Abraham F. Lowenthal, "Foreword" to *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy*, eds. Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), xi.

surrounding the Eurocommunist turn in Southern Europe during the mid-1970s. *Transitions* emerged from a broader set of transnational debates and dialogues of the preceding decade, which prompted political scholarship to grapple with new questions of authoritarian rule, regime change, and democratic stability and breakdown. Like the Committee, it coincided with the growing prominence of neo-Marxist debates about the capitalist state. Although these Marxist debates were largely sidestepped by *Transitions*, and practically absent from subsequent political science scholarship on comparative democratization, in the present chapter I will argue that they shared important and suggestive affinities with the project, and that it is possible to trace an influence from the former to the latter.

The collapse of the military dictatorships in Portugal, Spain, and Greece between 1974-1976 served as the immediate context for overlapping debates about a three-stage transition from authoritarianism to liberal democracy and possibly to socialism. By the mid-late 1970s, national politics in those countries (and even more notably in Italy and France) saw the emergence of “Eurocommunism” as the new political orientation of the radical left. There, neo-Marxist debates about the capitalist state figured prominently not only as academic exercises but as commentaries on the proper political strategy for communist parties and the emerging “new social movements” to effectively shepherd the transition from capitalism to socialism. By grappling with the questions surrounding the tactical politics and practical limits of democratization, *Transitions* covered much of the same theoretical ground as their Marxist contemporaries in France, Italy, and Spain at that time.

In addition, as *Transitions* suggested, the political changes in Southern Europe allowed for a productive comparison with the tumultuous waves of regime change that had characterized Latin American politics since the mid-1960s. The rise of what O’Donnell called the bureaucratic-

authoritarian state in the South American cone—Brazil (1964-1985), Argentina (1966-73, 1976-1983), Uruguay (1973-1985), and Chile (1973-1990)—problematized the widely held assumption that economic development would lead to liberalization, and appeared as the inverse of the relatively successful Southern European transitions. In particular, the Chilean experiment in incremental socialism and the subsequent coup against the government of Salvador Allende both served as an inspiration and a tragic lesson for concurrent Eurocommunist debates (in which Poulantzas and Miliband, among others, were involved), as well as for the cautious stance about transitions to socialism articulated by O'Donnell and Schmitter in their summary volume, “Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies.”

By underscoring the contingency of liberal transitions and the possibility of authoritarian reversals, the cases of Southern Europe and Latin America stood as rebuttals to socio-historical determinism in both its liberal-capitalist and Communist forms. The lessons drawn from these examples—characteristic of both *Transitions*' rejection of modernization theory, and the neo-Marxist rejection of orthodox Marxism—were that the political level could exist at a significant disjuncture from the socio-economic. As the Committee had also maintained, this disjuncture meant that the state loomed large as a social force and a political actor whose internal dynamics needed to be carefully studied and understood.

However, where *Transitions* differed from the Committee, and in this actually aligned closer with the neo-Marxist debates, was in their implication that the state also needed to be considered through the lens of *praxis*—that is, as a political target in its own right. In both accounts one can find an emphasis on the autonomy of the political level, from which were drawn conclusions about the possibility of democratic openings from within existing structural constraints, and the prospects of transitions toward more democratic forms of governance. No

discussion of political transitions could be complete without grappling with the practical question of how to direct strategic action toward existing state apparatuses and structures of power. Therefore, in both cases, the state figured in a larger account of the relationship between political agency and structure.

Using *Transitions* as the focal point of my discussion, this chapter will analyze this research initiative alongside the Eurocommunist and neo-Marxist debates on the state in order to provide a more complete picture of the central problems and issues that motivated the later scholarship on comparative democratization. Throughout this discussion, I will focus particularly on the writings of Guillermo O'Donnell, whose intellectual background, involvement with *Transitions*, and subsequent influence on comparative democratization scholarship in the United States, allowed him to act as a channel through which a number of the neo-Marxist conversations were adopted and reformulated into the disciplinary mainstream.

In Section I my discussion will concentrate on the theorization of dictatorship and authoritarianism in relation to the breakdown of liberal-democratic regimes. The study of this topic was a *political* problem in the 1970s for the researchers involved with *Transitions* and for the concurrent theoretical and political debates within Marxist circles. Marxist analyses of authoritarianism were advanced by Poulantzas' two contributions, *Fascism and Dictatorship* and *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, and the issue of dictatorship had also been raised within neo-Marxist discussions of the capitalist state and the transition to socialism by the debates surrounding the dictatorship of the proletariat. As I will argue, the Eurocommunist rejection of this language indicated a new theoretical and political relationship to the state, treated both as an object of knowledge and of political praxis. In that sense it coincided with the similar effort undertaken by *Transitions*, and its theoretical precedents in the works of Juan Linz, Alfred

Stepan, and especially O'Donnell (whose structural theorization and analysis of the bureaucratic-authoritarian state will be discussed in detail) to examine the internal workings and stability of authoritarian regimes.

Having evaluated the conceptualization of authoritarian states that arose within comparative political science and Marxism during the 1970s, in Section II my discussion will shift toward the closely related processes of transitions *from* authoritarianism and transitions *to* liberal democracy. Here I will focus primarily on the disciplinary origins and importance of *Transitions*, and suggest that there were important areas of overlap between it and the debates on regime transitions conducted some years earlier in the neo-Marxist scholarship. Special attention will be given to the summary conclusions drawn by O'Donnell and Schmitter in "Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies," since I argue that the "possibilistic" view of regime change articulated there was premised on a conception of the relative autonomy of politics that had obvious affinities with the neo-Marxist theorization of the capitalist state discussed in previous chapters. In particular, by complementing his earlier structural analyses of the authoritarian state with a greater emphasis on tactical and strategic political agency, O'Donnell turned the authoritarian state from an object of knowledge to an object of political praxis.

In Section III, I once again draw on *Transitions* and on concurrent neo-Marxist scholarship to discuss the possibilities and limitations of a transition *beyond* liberal democracy. While *Transitions* was normatively oriented to the establishment of liberal democratic regimes, democratic consolidation posed a new set of challenges. O'Donnell and Schmitter's relatively chastened conclusions with regard to economic and social (as opposed to political) democratization, can be fruitfully contrasted with the neo-Marxist debates about the viability of the "democratic road to socialism," and the Eurocommunist adoption of this general political

orientation. Here, the contemporary evaluations of Eurocommunism made by Poulantzas and Miliband reveal a similar concern with O'Donnell and Schmitter regarding the challenges of pushing to a transition to socialism. Yet despite the caution of *Transitions*, a crucial aspect of O'Donnell's writings from the early 1990s forward was his concern with the deepening of democratic institutions, and his insistence on seeing democracy not as an institutional regime but as an unfinished project involving the rule of law, citizenship, and the state. Therefore, I will argue that there is a continuity from his earliest research on authoritarianism to his later reflections on the crises of democratic consolidation that parallel the debates and concerns of neo-Marxist political theory regarding the state.

I. The Problem of the Authoritarian State

The third wave of democratization that opened with Portugal's Carnation Revolution in 1974 emerged from what Samuel Huntington has since characterized as a prior "second reverse wave" to the global spread of liberal democracy.⁴ From the late 1950s onward, authoritarian regimes took power in a majority of African and Latin American states, as well as parts of South and East Asia and Southern Europe (namely Greece and Turkey). These changes, coupled with the lack of fundamental reforms in the post-Stalin USSR and the Communist bloc, placed the relationship between authoritarianism and liberal democracy at the forefront of the concerns of scholars in the growing field of comparative politics. For example, it was in this context that Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan first began discussing their monumental collaborative research project *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*.⁵ In 1968-69, at the time of the project's

⁴ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

⁵ See Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds. *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), vii-x. Also of note here are Stepan's first book, *Authoritarian Brazil: Origins, Policies and Future* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), and Linz's contributions to Fred

gestation, both Linz and Stepan joined the Department of Political Science at Yale. There, along with David Apter and Robert Dahl, these scholars formed the core group that first introduced Guillermo O'Donnell to the field of "comparative politics" during his time as a Yale graduate student between 1968-1971.⁶

O'Donnell's studies at Yale resulted in his first book, *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism*, published in 1973. Bureaucratic authoritarianism preoccupied O'Donnell's research agenda over the course of the 1970s, and during that time his theoretical and conceptual approach also became more overtly influenced by neo-Marxism. This political phenomenon served as the background context for understanding the linkages between O'Donnell's theorization of the state and his later work on transitions from authoritarian rule, and requires a brief outline here.

In *Modernization and Bureaucratic Authoritarianism* O'Donnell drew upon theories of dependency developed by scholars like Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Enzo Faletto, and Celso Furtado to challenge the linear assumptions of modernization theory. He argued that in certain contexts economic development could *potentially* lead to a form of military-authoritarian rule that combined bureaucratic centralization and the colonization of society by technocratic forces. He coined the very term "bureaucratic authoritarianism" as a combination of Apter's account of bureaucratic systems as vertical arrangements of authority, and Linz's theorization of

I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.) *Handbook of Political Science* Vol. III: *Macropolitical Theory* (Addison-Wesley, 1975), later republished as Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Lanham, MD: Lynne Rienner, 2000).

⁶ See Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers*, 123-128; David Lehmann, *Democracy and Development in Latin America: Economics, Politics, and Religion in the Postwar Period* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990); and the interview with O'Donnell in *Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics*, 276-278.

authoritarian regimes as ones of limited pluralism, low ideological content, and the political deactivation of the masses.⁷

In cursory terms, bureaucratic authoritarianism was a political phenomenon generated by the peculiar structural and historical development of Latin American politics and society. It initially emerged in the most economically developed and modernized Latin American countries—Brazil and Argentina—as a consequence of the deepening process of capitalist development in the periphery spurred by import substitution industrialization, and the social transformations introduced by populist movements between 1930s-1950s. Prior to the implantation of bureaucratic authoritarianism in Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, and Argentina, the state faced a crisis of inclusion where it “increasingly lost the capacity to control its allies and adversaries, and its evident crisis left it at the mercy of the most powerful sectors, both internal and external, operating on their societies.”⁸ The mass mobilization of the popular sector, increasing industrialization thanks to the growing presence of multinational companies and the local capitalists dependent on them, and the inability of existing state institutions to mediate these competing demands within civil society all created a “social impasse” in which this social arrangement reached its structural limits.⁹

The two key features of bureaucratic authoritarianism were a regime where the higher positions in government were occupied by individuals and groups from the armed forces, the public bureaucracy, and large private firms; the economic and political exclusion of a previously

⁷ Guillermo O’Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism* (University of California, Berkeley, 1973), 90-91. Remmer and Merckx note that O’Donnell’s emphasis on the role of expertise and the elective affinity of modernization and authoritarianism make bureaucratic authoritarianism a fundamentally Weberian concept; see Karen L. Remmer and Gilbert W. Merckx, “Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism Revisited,” *Latin American Research Review* 17 (1982): 3-40.

⁸ Guillermo O’Donnell, “Corporatism and the Question of the State,” in *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America*, ed. James M. Malloy (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), 56.

⁹ O’Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic Authoritarianism*, 53-85.

mobilized popular sector (through both repression and corporatist controls); and the narrowing or disappearance of the electoral arena and political parties. The Argentine and Brazilian bureaucratic authoritarian regimes were characterized by “the growth of organizational strength of many social sectors, the governmental attempts at control by ‘encapsulation,’ the career patterns and power-bases of most incumbents of technocratic roles, and the pivotal role played by large (public and private) bureaucracies.”¹⁰ The effect of these institutional changes were a general condition of depoliticization, where social and political issues were reduced to “technical” problems.¹¹ The primary task of the bureaucratic-authoritarian state was to mediate between the competing interests of the oligarchic, transnational, and national bourgeoisie; to stabilize and rationalize economic growth, production, and capital accumulation; and to exclude the popular sector from the political arena.

Bureaucratic authoritarianism was the product of a tenuous class coalition between a transnational bourgeoisie, some factions of the national bourgeoisie, the techno-bureaucracy, and the military, all held together by a mutual opposition to a mobilized working class.¹² As O’Donnell wrote, “the BA is a system of exclusion of the popular sector, based on the reaction of dominant sectors and classes to the political and economic crises to which populism and its developmentalist successors led.”¹³ This exclusion of the popular sector and the “rationalization” of society were the necessary tasks taken by the B-A state to regain the confidence of international capital. During its initial stages, the B-A state was simultaneously open to international capital and estranged from civil society; and as O’Donnell came to argue by the late 1970s, the structural pressure on the B-A state to “renationalize” itself in defense of the national

¹⁰ O’Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism*, 95.

¹¹ O’Donnell, “Reflections on the Patterns of Change in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State,” *Latin American Research Review* 13 (1978): 6.

¹² Guillhot, *The Democracy Makers*, 145.

¹³ O’Donnell, “Reflections on the Patterns of Change in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State,” 13.

bourgeoisie's interests could also fracture the B-A coalition and create a potential opening for political democracy.

Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism was largely a product of O'Donnell's engagement with the concepts and methodologies of the mainstream comparative politics that he encountered at Yale. It has been noted that the dependent variable in the book was the "political system," understood as a regime or the "institutionalized rules of political interaction;" and it was only after 1973 that O'Donnell broadened his referent of bureaucratic-authoritarianism to the "state."¹⁴ Whereas a discussion of "the state" or "the capitalist state" was practically absent from *Modernization*, in the decade that followed one can notice O'Donnell's growing recognition that understanding the phenomenon of bureaucratic authoritarianism required a more thorough investigation of the capitalist state as such. O'Donnell's shift from a concern with the *emergence* of the B-A state to its internal tensions and dynamics, and its influence on society, marked the most overtly structuralist phase of his career, leading him to a more theoretical concern with the state as an analytic object.¹⁵

O'Donnell's subsequent writings up until *Transitions* show his increased focus on the state as an analytical level of social reality that needed to be theoretically grasped within a specific problematic. In the mid-late 1970s, he advocated a "historical-structural" approach to move beyond both empiricism and conceptual reification.¹⁶ This meant drawing upon both classical social theory (Marx, Weber, Hintze) and contemporary neo-Marxism and dependency

¹⁴ Remmer and Merckx, "Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism Revisited," 6. The authors note the similarities between O'Donnell's definition of the state and those of European neo-Marxists, namely Poulantzas and Joachim Hirsch (37). See also O'Donnell, "Reply to Remmer and Merckx" in the same issue, p. 41-50.

¹⁵ O'Donnell, "Tensions in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State and the Question of Democracy," p. 36

¹⁶ O'Donnell borrowed this term from Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto's *Dependencia y desarrollo en America Latina* (1971), who discuss it in the Preface to the English edition, published as *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). See also Munck and Snyder, *Passion, Craft and Method*, 285-286.

theory (Cardoso and Faletto) to grasp “the historical *teranos*, the sites on which structures are analyzed” and to “investigate interrelationships through time between a system of forces and social relationships—capitalism—and its mutually consistent political domination patterns.” Invoking the Althusserian language of the *problematique*, O’Donnell argued that studying these patterns required concentrating on certain factors—such as productive forces, class formation and articulation, and the national state—in order to describe the historical cases they combined to form and the causal regularities underlying those historical changes.¹⁷ Methodologically, bureaucratic authoritarianism could only be fully understood “as a whole constituted through the interaction of its component parts.”¹⁸ Furthermore, the relationship between the economic and the political levels could be such that their correspondence would “have to be relatively independent of empirical variations in the genesis of each case.”¹⁹

O’Donnell’s theoretical framework was grounded in both Weberian and Marxian thought. Throughout his essays of the mid-late 1970s (and his entire academic career more broadly) he consistently emphasized the Weberian qualities of the state as the monopoly on the physical means of violence and territorial control. In his “*Apuntes para una teoria del Estado*” (“Notes for a Theory of the State”), his most theoretically inclined analysis of the state concept, he defined the state as “the specifically political component of domination in a territorially demarcated society”—with domination understood as a broader social phenomenon premised

¹⁷ O’Donnell, “Reflections on the Patterns of Change in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State,” 4-5. It is worth noting that although this was one of O’Donnell’s most widely read articles of the time, he soon rejected it as too structuralist and economistic. In his next two pieces, “The State and Alliances in Argentina” and “Tensions in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State and the Question of Democracy,” he aimed to “allow more interaction between the structure or economy, on the one hand, and politics, on the other.” See *Passion, Craft and Method*, 287.

¹⁸ O’Donnell, “Reflections on the Patterns of Change in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State,” 27.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

upon the unequal distribution of various material and ideological resources.²⁰ Likewise, in “Corporatism and the Question of the State” he wrote of the “analytic minimum” of the state as a “set of organizations and relationships pertaining to the ‘public’ sphere within a delimited territory, which claims from the population of this territory conformity with the expressed content of its commands and supports this claim with superior control of the means of physical violence.”²¹ And in “Tensions in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State and the Question of Democracy” he characterized the state as supporting and organizing the relations of domination “through institutions that usually enjoy a monopoly of the means of coercion within a defined territory and that generally are viewed as having a legitimate right to guarantee the system of social domination.”²²

However, these same works, along with his book *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism: Argentina 1966-1973, in Comparative Perspective* (written between 1971-1975, although not published until 1982), suggest O’Donnell was also quite influenced by the basic components of structural Marxism.²³ O’Donnell linked the elementary components of the Weberian theory of the state to a structural Marxist emphasis on the state understood as an “ensemble of social relations that gives rise to a system of class domination.”²⁴ The capitalist state was the “strictly political aspect of the social relations of domination,” on an equally important footing as the

²⁰ Guillermo O’Donnell, “Apuntes para una teoría del Estado,” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* Vol. 40, no. 4 (1978): 1158.

²¹ O’Donnell, “Corporatism and the Question of the State,” 50. See also the similar definition in “Reflections on the Patterns of Change in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State.”

²² Guillermo O’Donnell, “Tensions in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State and the Question of Democracy,” in *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America*, ed. David Collier (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 287.

²³ Guillermo O’Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism: Argentina, 1966-1973, in Comparative Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). The delay in the book’s publication was due to O’Donnell returning to Argentina prior to completing his doctorate

²⁴ O’Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism*, 14.

strictly economic side of that domination. Its task was to organize social classes and provide a coercive and ideological guarantee of the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production.²⁵

For O'Donnell, the capitalist state was essentially the political relationship that “organizes the capitalist relations of production by articulating and buffering the relationships among classes and by providing elements necessary to their ‘normal,’ unchallenged reproduction.” Its role as the stabilizer and mediator of the competitive elements of civil society required it to act as the guarantor of “the ensemble of social relations that establish the bourgeoisie as the dominant class.”²⁶ But while the bourgeoisie needed the state in order to “guarantee their own survival and expansion,” O'Donnell rejected instrumentalist arguments.²⁷ He wrote that the state was not “the state *of* the bourgeoisie” but a capitalist state—a fine distinction that also figured as a key point of contention in the Miliband-Poulantzas debate. In other words, the custodial role that the state assumed with respect to the general interest of the bourgeoisie also required it to frequently distance itself from the bourgeoisie's immediate interests (as evidenced by the emergence of bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes in response to popular mobilizations).

O'Donnell identified two distinct levels for discussions of the state. First, he treated the capitalist state on an analytical level as akin to other intangible concepts such as the bourgeoisie, classes, or social relations. In this sense the state was “*comprehensible only analytically...as the political aspect of certain social relations of domination.*”²⁸ At the same time, the state was also concretely objectified in various social actors, including institutions, apparatuses, and legal norms. At face value these concrete objectifications could be mistaken for the state as such; yet

²⁵ O'Donnell, “Tensions in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State”, 287.

²⁶ O'Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism*, 2.

²⁷ O'Donnell, “Corporatism and the Question of the State,” 60.

²⁸ O'Donnell, “Tensions in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State and the Question of Democracy,” 286-287. My emphasis.

the appearance of the state as its institutions was a fetishized conception of political power that concealed the real basis of class domination in civil society. “The state is not merely a set of institutions,” wrote O’Donnell; “It also includes—fundamentally—the network of relationships of ‘political’ domination activated and supported by such institutions in a territorially defined society, which supports and contributes to the reproduction of a society’s class organization.”²⁹ Or as he put it elsewhere, “the institutions of the state are an objectified moment in the global process of the production and circulation of power,” and so, while “the state is primarily a condensation of relations of social domination, [it] is to be understood only secondarily as a set of bureaucratic institutions.”³⁰

Locating the basis of the state in social relations also allowed O’Donnell to analytically distinguish between the concepts of state, regime, and government. Regime and government were the visible and “objectified” apparatuses and institutions of the social relationship of the state. Thus, by regime, O’Donnell meant the set of effective patterns that determine “(1) modalities of recruitment and access to governmental roles, and (2) criteria of representation on the basis of which are formulated expectations regarding access to those roles and expectations regarding influence over their incumbents.” And by government, he meant the set of persons who occupy “the higher positions in the state apparatus, access to which is determined by the existing regime and from which may be mobilized, by the respective national state, its coercive

²⁹ Guillermo O’Donnell, “State and Alliances in Argentina, 1956-1976” *Journal of Development Studies* 15 (1978): 24.

³⁰ O’Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism*, 3; O’Donnell, “Notes for the Study of Processes of Political Democratization in the wake of the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State,” in O’Donnell, *Counterpoints: Selected Essays on Authoritarianism and Democratization* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 128fn21.

supremacy over the territory it delimits.”³¹ If government was the apex of the state apparatus, the regime was the network of routes leading to it.³²

In addition, O’Donnell emphasized that the state needed to be “redeemed conceptually...at a level which permits the detection of its changes through time, together with its differential modes of linkage with diverse social classes and sectors at each stage.”³³ For example, Latin America’s historical conscription to the periphery (as a result of its colonization during the competitive stage of capitalism) left a greater role for the state apparatus to expand its role as an economic entrepreneur and a mediator of social relations between capital and labor. Thus, unlike theories of the state in the Anglo-American world, where the state was assumed to emerge in response to the needs of civil society, in the periphery the state apparatus played a much more active and prominent role, shaping society by cultivating a domestic bourgeoisie and building “the nation.”³⁴ In these cases the state was not the outgrowth of civil society but an agent that could synthesize a heterogeneous civil society, by unifying its territory as a space for the circulation of goods, and by promoting forms of nationhood to match those territorial boundaries; in effect, homogenizing a common political space in terms of economic and ideological practices.³⁵

Here, O’Donnell’s perspective can be contrasted with the Committee on States and Social Structures and the emphasis that it placed on state autonomy. Like the Committee, O’Donnell rejected “societalist” accounts found in pluralist, structural functionalist, and orthodox Marxist

³¹ O’Donnell, “Notes for the Study of the Processes of Political Democratization in the Wake of the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State,” 127.

³² O’Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism*, 6. He notes that polyarchic regimes, as defined by Robert Dahl, were incompatible with a bureaucratic-authoritarian state.

³³ O’Donnell, “Corporatism and the Question of the State,” 81.

³⁴ O’Donnell, “Comparative Historical Formations of the State Apparatus and Socio-Economic Change in the Third World,” *International Social Science Journal* 32 (1980): 717-729.

³⁵ This account of the state’s spatial and temporal homogenization of territory has important similarities with that Poulantzas’ discussion of the nation in *State, Power, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1978), 93-120.

theories, which “deny or ignore the specificity of the problem of the state as a societal factor endowed with varying, but rarely insignificant, capabilities for autonomous impulse or initiative.”³⁶ At the same time, he noted that recent developments in the opposite direction could lead to an oversimplified “politicism” or “statism” that saw political development in terms of the accumulation of power (as represented by Huntington’s *Political Order in Changing Societies*). Thus, “to postulate the generic problem of the relative autonomy of the state vis-à-vis society, or to list diverse aspects of its domination,” without having also the constructed typologies that could link individual cases to general types of regime, was to pose a problem without having resolved it.³⁷

O’Donnell’s historical-structural view of the state as a component of social domination thus allowed him to provide a more nuanced description of state-society interactions. The peculiar historical and spatial conditions of capitalist development in Latin America as compared to nineteenth-century Europe allowed multinational corporations to insert themselves into society and the domestic economy.³⁸ Argentina was a case in point. Between 1956-1976, the Argentinian state had been “deeply colonized and fractionalized” by the struggles within civil society, leaving it weak and with “extremely limited autonomy.” The country became susceptible to bureaucratic authoritarianism because it lacked a “fairly stable and consolidated bureaucratic apparatus, with non-negligible degrees of freedom vis-à-vis civil society.”³⁹ The bureaucratic authoritarian state sought to transform society, “to control it and render it predictable so that it is possible to obtain the necessary transfusions of international capital,” although that same dependence on

³⁶ O’Donnell, “Corporatism and the Question of the State,” 52.

³⁷ O’Donnell, “Corporatism and the Question of the State,” 77.

³⁸ O’Donnell, “Corporatism and the Question of the State,” 60-62; O’Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism*, 14.

³⁹ O’Donnell, “The State and Alliances in Argentina, 1956-1976,” 25-26.

transnational capital also made it less capable of doing so than fascist regimes.⁴⁰ Eventually, the weakening of this coalition between the bureaucracy, transnational capital, and fractions of national capital at the heart of the bureaucratic authoritarian state led it to attempt a populist renationalization, which, by reopening itself to the dominant local fractions of civil society, also provided the openings for the regime's collapse.⁴¹

O'Donnell's studies of bureaucratic authoritarianism thus situate him between the pluralist and "statist" arguments that preoccupied Anglo-American political science and political sociology during the 1970s.⁴² Treating the capitalist state as a social relationship and as an analytical starting point allowed him to emphasize a view of the state as embedded within the totality of social relations, rather than what he called the reified and mystified view of the state as reducible to its concrete institutions. As he pointed out, the bureaucratic authoritarian state "neither floats above the social classes in sovereign fashion, carrying out its projects of 'national grandeur,' nor is it the puppet or representative of international capital;" nor did it merely serve as the space within which 'groups' within civil society reconciled their competing interests.⁴³ The historical-structural contradictions and dynamics of the bureaucratic authoritarian state could only be understood if examined alongside both the class and ideological fractions of civil society and the transnational sphere (especially international capital). More generally, it was the inherent antagonism generated by the contradictions between capital and labor, and the resulting "uneven

⁴⁰ O'Donnell, "Reflections on the Patterns of Change in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State," 15.

⁴¹ O'Donnell, "Reflections on the Patterns of Change in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State," 25.

⁴² The names from the Anglo-American literature cited by O'Donnell in his discussion of state theory ("Corporatism and the Question of the State," 82) span widely, including Arthur Bentley, David Truman, Talcott Parsons, Karl Deutsch, Seymour Martin Lipset, Samuel Huntington, J.P. Nettl, Charles Tilly, Barrington Moore, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Perry Anderson. Poulantzas is mentioned as an example of Marxist thought that does not treat the state as a dependent variable of socio-economic development. Apparently, O'Donnell was working with a 1973 volume titled *Hegemonia y Dominacion en el Estado Moderno* composed of Spanish translations of four essays by Poulantzas written between 1964-1967.

⁴³ O'Donnell, "Reflections on the Patterns of Change in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State," 15; O'Donnell, "Corporatism and the Question of the State," 80.

articulation of social classes in society,” that led the state to appear as an actor “external” to the social relations that linked capital to labor.⁴⁴

Like contemporary neo-Marxists, O’Donnell also took a particular interest in the ideological dimensions of the state and its legitimation. The state’s ability to provide for the reproduction of capitalist social relations did not rest on coercion alone, but just as importantly on certain fundamental political mediations—namely, the nation, citizenship, and the notion of *lo pueblo* or *lo popular*.⁴⁵ While civil society was essentially diverse and antagonistic, the nation provided a form of symbolic solidarity that was superimposed onto this plurality of interests to provide a form of cohesion. Citizenship bestowed a degree of legitimacy to the state by endowing individuals with a form of juridical equality that, while abstract, was not insignificant, since it provided for greater political voice through universal suffrage, political democracy, and judicial recourse against arbitrary power. Finally, *lo pueblo* was an alliance of the urban working classes and middle sectors that allowed for the projection of a common, popular “we” that could articulate demands for substantive justice from the state, and in the process became a collective subject conscious of its own domination.⁴⁶

On one hand the state could use these popular mediations to represent itself as standing above the factionalism of civil society. At the same time, there was a general tension between “the underlying reality of the state as guarantor and organizer of social domination...and as an

⁴⁴ O’Donnell, “Apuntes para una teoría del Estado,” 4; *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism*, 3-4.

⁴⁵ O’Donnell, “Tensions in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State and the Question of Democracy.”

⁴⁶ In *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism* (24-25), O’Donnell cited Laclau’s *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* as one of the main influences for his reflections on Latin American populism. *Lo popular* was a social component that often acted as a substitute where a historical legacy of abstract, universal citizenship was absent, such as in most Latin American countries. As he wrote, “successful appeals to *lo popular*, or to wage-earners as a class, introduce political forces and collective identities that the existing regime cannot absorb without undergoing important transformations.”

agent of a general interest which, though partialized and limited, is not fictitious.”⁴⁷ Taking a position very similar to the ones advocated by Miliband, Poulantzas, and Laclau at the time, O’Donnell maintained that, while insufficient on their own, citizenship, political democracy, and *lo popular* could, in certain conjunctures, provide the institutional, juridical, and discursive resources by which dominated classes could carve out social and political spaces to articulate demands and realize their interests. As we will see in Section IV, these elements of legitimation played an important role for O’Donnell’s thinking with regard to the transitions and deepening of liberal democracy.

Largely due to O’Donnell’s influence, Latin American scholarship on the state came to see it as a locus of domination that mediated between national and transnational capital, and whose attempts to compensate for the deficiencies of capitalist development in the semi-periphery led to the emergence of a new kind of technocratic authoritarian regime.⁴⁸ Yet O’Donnell’s treatment of the bureaucratic authoritarian state itself clearly engaged and borrowed various elements from contemporary neo-Marxist political theory, especially Poulantzas, Laclau, Cardoso and Faletto, and Altvater.⁴⁹ When asked in an interview whether his treatment of the state as a regulator of capitalist social relations drew either upon Poulantzas or the capital logic school of Holloway and Picciotto, O’Donnell responded that he had had conversations with

⁴⁷ O’Donnell, “Tensions in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State,” 290.

⁴⁸ For a summary discussion, see Norbert Lechner, “Politics and the State in Latin America,” in *Estado y Política en América Latina* (Siglo XXI, 1981). O’Donnell and Laclau were among the contributors to this edited volume.

⁴⁹ Spanish translations of Poulantzas’ work began appearing in the late 1960s, including of *Political Power and Social Classes* in 1969 (four years before it appeared in English). A translation of *The Crisis of the Dictatorships* appeared in 1976, followed by a collection of Poulantzas’ earlier essays under the title *Hegemonía y Dominación en el Estado Moderno*, and another edited volume, *La Crisis del Estado* in 1977. See Mabel Thwaites Rey, “The Poulantzas Contribution to Think Latin America” (sic) Paper for the seminar Forty Years of *Political Power and Social Classes*, University of Salford, (September 2008), <http://www.mabelthwaitesrey.com.ar/wp-content/uploads/art-period/Poulantzas%20in%20Latin%20America-2.pdf>

Elmar Altvater, and suspected that he and Poulantzas had been reading each other during that time.⁵⁰ As O'Donnell later remarked, “for my generation, Marx was everywhere and was an influence by osmosis, in the language, in the discussions.”⁵¹

This engagement was also evident in other accounts of authoritarianism from that time. For example, in his 1978 book *The State and Society: Peru in Comparative Perspective*, Alfred Stepan called both Miliband's *The State in Capitalist Society* and Poulantzas' *Political Power and Social Classes* “important attempts to invigorate the Marxist analysis of the state,” using Miliband to argue that Marxists had rarely previously dealt with the question of the state in actually existing capitalist societies, and Poulantzas to internally critique instrumentalist and economic analyses of the capitalist state.⁵² And despite his ultimate rejection of the Marxist conception of the state in favor of an organic conception, Stepan did maintain that “the creation of political domination via the state apparatus is the result of shifting coalitions of class fractions and the forging (or nonforging) of a ‘hegemonic block’ is a fit subject for independent analysis.”⁵³

Stepan's book became one of the key reference points for the revival of interest in the state among political scientists of the late 1970s as represented by the Committee on States and Social Structures. Stepan himself was a participant on the Committee, where his paper for the Mt.

⁵⁰ Maria Alicia Gutierrez, Fabian Repetto and Mabel Thwaites Rey, “Dialogando con Guillermo O'Donnell: Estado, sociedad, y ciudadanía en épocas de hegemonía neoliberal” *DOXA*, No. 17 (1997): 1; <http://www.mabelthwaitesrey.com.ar/wp-content/uploads/entrevistas/02.pdf>

⁵¹ Interview with Guillermo O'Donnell, *Passion Craft and Method*, 286. In the same interview, O'Donnell notes that the writings of the young Marx, rather than the Marx of *Capital*, were more influential for him, although it is unclear whether he is referring to the time when the interview was conducted (2002) or the past.

⁵² Stepan, *The State and Society*, 21. In addition, Stepan's account included mentions of Gramsci's concepts of hegemony and Althusser's notion of the state's role in the reproduction of the means of production through the Ideological State Apparatuses toward the creation of an independent national bourgeoisie.

⁵³ Stepan, *The State and Society*, 23.

Kisco conference, titled “Civil Society and the State: Patterns of Resistance to Domination in the Southern Cone,” again engaged with Poulantzas’ ideas. There, he argued that neither the “primarily functionalist” *Political Power and Social Classes* nor the class-reductive *State, Power, Socialism* adequately captured the state’s character as a bureaucratic collectivity with resources and interests of its own, since it neglected the relative capacity of dominant groups to lead their allies, the cohesion of the state apparatus, the state’s ability to generate a pattern of structural domination, and the ability of opposition in civil society to resist such domination.⁵⁴ Analyzing Brazil’s process of democratization, Stepan wrote that “class relations are condensed and refracted within the military but in the last analysis, the military has some independent interests and power” that cannot be neglected.⁵⁵

The analysis of Latin American authoritarianism found in O’Donnell and Stepan’s works dovetailed with a broader set of theoretical and political discussions about dictatorship and the transition to socialism occurring within neo-Marxist circles in Europe and the Americas during that time. These controversies appeared in numerous forms. They were foreshadowed in the Miliband-Poulantzas debate, on the question of whether Bonapartism was a definitive feature of liberal-capitalist states, with Miliband arguing that structuralist analyses could not capture the important normative differences between these types of regimes. They were also heightened by the fallout from the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968 and the internal debates within the Italian Communist Party (PCI) concerning the authoritarian character of the Soviet model. Furthermore, in the same year as O’Donnell published *Modernization and Bureaucratic-*

⁵⁴ Alfred Stepan, “Civil Society and the State: Patterns of Resistance to Domination in the Southern Cone,” Paper for SSRC Conference on States and Social Structures, Folder 1322, Box 219, Series I, Social Science Research Council 19, the Rockefeller Center Archive, 2. This was excluded from the essay that appeared in *Bringing the State Back In* under the title of “State Power and the Strength of Civil Society in the Southern Cone of Latin America.”

⁵⁵ Stepan, “Civil Society and the State: Patterns of Resistance to Domination in the Southern Cone,” 40.

Authoritarianism, his analysis was bolstered by the Chilean military coup against the Popular Unity government of Allende. As Miliband observed, somewhat disapprovingly, for many Western and Latin American Marxists and radicals, Chile from 1970 to 1973 had been a “test case for the peaceful or parliamentary transition to socialism.”⁵⁶ There is no doubt that the end of this experiment in a U.S.-backed military coup contributed to a growing recognition among Western European communist parties, and especially the PCI, about the need for an explicit commitment to parliamentary politics, the rejection of the Leninist strategy for taking state power, and the importance of expanding their base of support beyond the working classes if they did not wish for a similar outcome.⁵⁷

This reconsideration of authoritarianism and the search for a third way between liberal capitalist democracy and Soviet communism led the PCI, Spanish Communist Party (PCE), and to a lesser extent the French Communist Party (PCF), to shift toward a set of positions that collectively came to be known as “Eurocommunism” between approximately 1975 and 1980. In a sense, Eurocommunism represented a belated theoretical attempt to justify the parliamentary approach and the doctrine of peaceful coexistence that had already long been part of the practice of Communist parties in the West. In place of Leninist ideas of the vanguard party and the strategic goal of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Communists now advocated coalitions with socialist and Christian Democratic parties; cross-class alliances forming a democratic front; a

⁵⁶ Ralph Miliband, “The Coup in Chile,” in Miliband, *Class War Conservatism and Other Essays* (London: Verso, 2015). Miliband attributed the Allende government’s failure to its moderate and conciliatory tendencies. The evaluation of Chile found in Linz and Stepan’s *Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* was diametrically opposite, attributing it to political polarization and the disappearance of a moderate center; see especially Arturo Valenzuela’s contributions to the volume.

⁵⁷ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 495. As Santiago Carrillo put it in *Eurocommunism and the State* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1978, 13), “The Chilean experience shows that under the regime of Popular Unity, committed to a socialist experiment, the State apparatus continued to be an instrument of capitalist rule, deeply penetrated, furthermore, by US imperialism, its services and multi-nationals.”

democratization and decentralization of the state via an extension of parliamentary control over insular state institutions; and the adoption of a democratically planned mixed economy with elements of workers' self-management.⁵⁸ In addition, as was highlighted by the 1977 conference put together by the Italian *Il Manifesto* group under the title of "Power and Opposition in Post-Revolutionary Societies," the legacy of Soviet repression required the opening of a more self-critical dialogue between Western leftists and political dissidents from the Communist bloc.⁵⁹

This attempt at ideological reorientation was emblematic in the PCF's decision to drop the dictatorship of the proletariat as an object of Marxist scientific and political practice at its 22nd Congress in February 1976. This move, which prompted an extended rebuttal by Etienne Balibar, proved largely symbolic, as the Common Program that the PCF and the Socialist Party had negotiated in 1972 was unraveling by that point.⁶⁰ Balibar's theoretical attempt to preserve the dictatorship of the proletariat from both obsolescence and association with the Soviet Union rested on pointing out that dictatorship remained at the heart of all forms of state power—as he wrote, "State power is always *the power of a class*...the instrument of the ruling class"—and thereby associating all forms of democracy, whether bourgeois or communist, with different forms of class dictatorship.⁶¹

⁵⁸ The definitive theoretical discussions from a Eurocommunist standpoint are Carrillo's *Eurocommunism and the State* and Fernando Claudin, *Eurocommunism and Socialism* (London: New Left Books, 1978). For a sympathetic critique, see Miliband's 1978 essay "Constitutionalism and Revolution," in *Class War Conservatism*.

⁵⁹ *Il Manifesto*, *Power and Opposition in Post-Revolutionary Societies* (London: Ink Links, 1979).

⁶⁰ For representative discussions of the dictatorship of the proletariat during the 1970s, see Etienne Balibar, *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (London: Verso, 1977); Ralph Miliband, "The State and Revolution" in *Class War Conservatism and Other Essays*; and Lucio Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin* (1972), 219-228. Two years later, the PCE also abandoned Leninism in a symbolic move that was opposed by one third of the delegates at that year's Party congress.

⁶¹ Balibar, *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, 66, 70. See also Benton, *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism*, 152-163.

This and similar defenses of Leninist orthodoxy provided the basis of Poulantzas' criticisms in his final two books, *The Crisis of the Dictatorships* and *State, Power, Socialism*, and related essays during the closing of the decade.⁶² In his attempts to drive a wedge between the connotation of Marxism with dictatorship, Poulantzas voiced a left criticism of both liberal-capitalist and socialist states. Poulantzas was skeptical that a centralized political party could capture the diverse political and social struggles within postwar capitalist societies, and saw the dictatorship of the proletariat as an impediment to the process of making successful alliances among various classes and class fractions. If Lenin's call for council democracy was not balanced by representative democratic institutions, it would sooner consolidate into a "dictatorship of the Party" rather than into an authentic dictatorship of the proletariat.⁶³

As will be discussed further below, in Poulantzas works from this period one could find an account of the social forces at play in the crisis of the Southern European dictatorships that overlapped with O'Donnell's contemporary analyses of the bureaucratic-authoritarian state. For both authors, the military dictatorships of Southern Europe and Latin America were symptoms of the transnationalization of capital and its penetration into the fabrics of these societies, and the emergence of an exceptional form of capitalist state that combined military rule with technocratic expertise and the decline of parliamentarism (the "authoritarian statism" that Poulantzas observed was also becoming a prominent characteristic of liberal-democratic capitalist regimes). These similarities between the Southern European transitions and the Latin

⁶² *The Crisis of the Dictatorships* was reviewed in the *APSR* as a work that represented a "direct confrontation between the radically divergent paradigms of politics presented by Marxism and mainstream political science" (Peter Cocks, "Review of *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*" *American Political Science Review* 73 [1978]: 1124-1125). A more critical *APSR* review of Poulantzas' *Fascism and Dictatorship* by A. James Gregor appeared in *American Political Science Review* 71 (1977): 1649-1650.

⁶³ See especially *State, Power, Socialism*, 20, 124; and "Interview with Nicos Poulantzas" (387-402) and "The State and the Transition to Socialism" (334-360) in *The Poulantzas Reader*.

American breakdowns and reemergence of liberal democracy were also the basis of the collaborative Wilson Center project *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*.

II. Transitions from Authoritarian Rule and the State

When *Transitions* began in 1979, the Latin American Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, where the project originated, was itself a new institution. The Program had been established in 1977 under the directorship of Abraham Lowenthal, who was able to secure the sponsorship of both the Ford Foundation and (like the Committee for States and Social Structures) the Rockefeller Foundation. Its Advisory Board was chaired by Albert Hirschman, and among its eight members were O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Cardoso. It was thanks to the initiative of these three scholars that the Latin America Program convened three annual conferences on "Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy in Latin America and Southern Europe" that were held between 1979-1981, bringing together prominent scholars of political science that also included such figures as Robert Dahl, Juan Linz, Adam Przeworski, Alfred Stepan, and Laurence Whitehead, among others.⁶⁴

O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead noted that when the working group on transitions from authoritarianism was first organized, there was a glaring lack of scholarship on the topic. Linz and Stepan's work *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, published the year before, had mainly covered the process "in reverse", and "most contemporary theorizing about democracy was oriented exclusively toward explaining how such regimes functioned, *not* how they came into being."⁶⁵ The fluid political situations in the regions covered made the project highly

⁶⁴ See Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers*, 138-139; Lowenthal, "Foreword" to *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy*, xi.

⁶⁵ Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, "Editors' Note," in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule Vol. III: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 168.

topical: Spain, Portugal, and Greece had all undergone successful transitions to liberal democracy in the prior four years; while in Latin America, Brazil had recently begun its slow reversion to civilian rule, but Argentina and Chile were still under the control of brutal military regimes. These circumstances, and the international list of contributors, made the project “the first book in any language that systematically and comparatively focuses on the process of transition from authoritarian regimes.”⁶⁶ They also lent to *Transitions* both a degree of urgency and a political character. Lowenthal’s neologism of “thoughtful wishing” captured the project’s role as an intellectual effort seeking to intervene in a contemporary political moment to aid in successful transitions to liberal democracy.⁶⁷

It is frequently argued that the main contribution of *Transitions* to comparative politics was its theorizing of the process of democratization through the lens of political agency.⁶⁸ In this sense, *Transitions* is frequently contrasted to previous macro-societal works such as Seymour Martin Lipset’s *Political Man* or Barrington Moore’s *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*—as well as O’Donnell’s prior research on the bureaucratic authoritarian state. Unlike the historical and structural bent of those works, the contributors to *Transitions* emphasized the importance of agency and contingency for liberalization. As Gerardo Munck nicely summarizes in retrospect,

“The new theorizing focused on process, drew attention to both state actors and societal actors, and analyzed the choices made by these actors. Rejecting structuralist determinism, O’Donnell and Schmitter argued that political outcomes

⁶⁶ Lowenthal, “Foreword,” ix.

⁶⁷ See Rafael Khachaturian, “Uncertain Knowledge and Democratic Transitions: Revisiting O’Donnell and Schmitter’s *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*,” *Polity* 47 (2015): 14-139. For recollections about the project from the participants, see the following pages in *Passion, Craft, and Method*: O’Donnell, 288-292; Schmitter, 322-328; Stepan, 429; Przeworski, 468-469.

⁶⁸ See for example Mahoney, “Strategies of Causal Assessment in Comparative Historical Analysis,” and Gerardo L. Munck, “The Regime Question: Theory Building in Democracy Studies,” *World Politics* 54 (2001): 119-144. See also Herbert Kitschelt, “Political Regime Change: Structure and Process-Driven Explanations?” *American Political Science Review* 86 (1992): 1028-1034, for a discussion of

were ‘underdetermined’ from the perspective of macrostructural factors, since political outcomes were contingent on the strategic choices of actors and, most critically, because key characteristics of the relevant actors such as their power were not givens but rather were affected by their choices and underwent significant changes in the course of the political process itself.”⁶⁹

In that regard, the project has been primarily remembered for its emphasis on the *political*, rather than social, character of transitions. Like Linz and Stepan’s *Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, the contributors placed the spotlight on the strategic choices made by political leaders, parties, and groups, who by virtue of their privileged positions on either the side of the regime or the opposition, could effectively shepherd transitions with minimal recourse to violence and a greater chance of liberal-democratic consolidation. In effect, *Transitions* had allowed O’Donnell to continue his late-1970s shift from structuralism to a greater emphasis on the contingency of the political process.

O’Donnell and Schmitter identified three interrelated components to the transition process—liberalization, democratization, and socialization—with the bulk of their theoretical conclusions in *Tentative Conclusions* being made about the first two of these stages. Liberalization was “the process of making effective certain rights that protect both individuals and social groups from arbitrary or illegal acts committed by the state or third parties.”⁷⁰ This could initially come about through a coalition between the reform-oriented members of the ruling alliance and the moderate opposition, in a process that slowly opened the channels for a further transition. Democratization, on the other hand, meant a variety of processes that modified existing institutions and practices by expanding their inclusivity to citizen participation. While liberalization and democratization coexisted in tandem in a political democracy or polyarchy,

⁶⁹ Gerardo L. Munck, “Democratic Theory after *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*,” *Perspectives on Politics* 9 (2011): 335.

⁷⁰ Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* Vol. IV: *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 7.

they were analytically and temporally separable during transitions, due to the fact that authoritarian regimes could in some cases tolerate liberalization without extending the umbrella of political participation and inclusion to the citizenry at large.

O'Donnell and Schmitter were more optimistic about the potential for successful transitions and democratic consolidation to occur in Southern Europe than in Latin America, and their moderate stance on the key elements of a successful transition were based on their observations from the 1970s.⁷¹ At the time of the project's conclusion, the attainment of full political democracy in Portugal, Greece, and Spain had happened surprisingly rapidly, with the former two undergoing liberalization and democratization almost contemporaneously.⁷² In all three cases, the transitions were aided by their geographical proximity to Western Europe, by the existence of strong party systems representing deeply held partisan identities, and by the left's acceptance of the peaceful rotation of power.⁷³ Notably, none of the Southern European transitions saw a truly revolutionary break with the previous political order.⁷⁴

While Portugal served as the more promising case for the radical left, Spain became the model transition both for the project and for the scholarship that followed in its wake, since it was initiated by softliners from within the regime in anticipation of Franco's death, and involved a gradual liberalization secured through elite pacting. Pacts, understood as negotiated

⁷¹ In contrast, the greater political role played by the military, the greater degree of socio-economic inequality, and the more frequent use of informal political pacts in the Latin American cases made liberal-democratic consolidation more uncertain. See O'Donnell's "Introduction to the Latin American Cases" in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* Vol. II: *Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

⁷² O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, 44.

⁷³ See Philippe C. Schmitter, "An Introduction to Southern European Transitions from Authoritarian Rule" in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* Vol. I: *Southern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), and O'Donnell, "Introduction to the Latin American Cases."

⁷⁴ See especially the following essays in *TFAR* Vol. I: Salvador Giner, "Political Economy, Legitimation, and the State in Southern Europe," 11-44; Jose Maria Maravall and Julian Santamaria, "Political Change in Spain and the Prospects for Democracy," 71-108; Kenneth Maxwell, "Regime Overthrow and the Prospects for Democratic Transition in Portugal," 109-137; and P. Nikiforos Diamandouros, "Regime Change and the Prospects for Democracy in Greece: 1974-1983," 138-164.

compromises and mutual assurances of moderation made by representatives of established groups and institutions, were particularly important. Paradoxically, they were undemocratic means of moving the polity toward democracy; for while they reduced competitiveness and accountability, they potentially secured the mutual assurance and basic “rules of the game” that stabilized the moment of structural indeterminacy between two different regimes.⁷⁵ One outcome of this strategy was the legalization of the PCE in 1977, and the party’s agreement to accede to the rules of the liberal democratic order was one of the final stages of the overall pacted transition. Spain was thus the only country that underwent both a transition to liberal democracy and an ideological shift to Eurocommunism among its left.

Considering O’Donnell and Schmitter’s focus on the importance of liberalizing openings, elite coalitions, and pacting, Nicolas Guilhot has observed that the transitions paradigm marked the closure of the left-wing politics associated with Latin American dependency theory. Theories of the capitalist state developed during the previous decade were transformed “into a description of the possible ‘games’ between the different fractions of the ruling elite and the probable outcomes in terms of political regime.”⁷⁶ Guilhot is correct to note that while the authors drew upon their “critical knowledge of the state” via their earlier immersion in studies of dependence and corporatism, “the new analysis of the state was no longer systemic, nor were the political remedies suggested, since the economic structures were, on the whole left out.”⁷⁷ Indeed, references to “the state” are almost wholly absent from O’Donnell and Schmitter’s *Tentative Conclusions*, and the fundamental concept of “transition” was defined as an interval between

⁷⁵ O’Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, 38-39.

⁷⁶ Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers*, 147.

⁷⁷ Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers*, 161, 143

different *regimes*.⁷⁸ By largely sidestepping a discussion of “socialization” as a third component of transitions, the project unfolded with the assumption of an ongoing persistence of capitalist relations of production and international economic order.⁷⁹

For O’Donnell, the study of democratic openings needed to be conducted on a more fine-grained scale than his previous macro-social studies of the capitalist state. As one author put it, “having attempted to scale the heights of the general theory of the state, he found himself ineluctably thrown back into the world of agency and subjectivity” by the early 1980s.⁸⁰ In a 1979 paper written for one of the *Transitions* meetings titled “Notes for the Study of Processes of Political Democratization in the Wake of the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State,” O’Donnell attempted to grapple with the ongoing Southern European transitions, and as he put it elsewhere, to extend the “analytical frontiers” of the bureaucratic-authoritarian state to other regions subject to similar patterns of socio-economic development, including both Spain and Greece.⁸¹ In this essay he laid the groundwork for liberalization and democratic openings that later appeared in *Tentative Conclusions*, including outlining the interests and optimal relationships between hardliners and softliners within the regime and opposition; the importance of taming the maximalists on both sides in order to form a competitive party system; and emphasizing that the moderate opposition needed to play the leading role in the transition, preventing it from both stalling into a *dictablanda* (liberalized dictatorship) or accelerating into a social revolution. This

⁷⁸ O’Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, 6. One of the few, passing mentions of the state in *Tentative Conclusions* (62, 64) noted it had become inseparably linked to the national and internationalized capitalist economies, making alteration in government more likely as voters punished incumbent parties for economic underperformances.

⁷⁹ As Bermeo notes, the case studies included in the first two volumes provided ample evidence of economic crises being the necessary conditions for transitions—something O’Donnell and Schmitter hardly discussed in *Tentative Conclusions*. See Nancy Bermeo, “Rethinking Regime Change,” *Comparative Politics* 22 (1990): 359-377.

⁸⁰ Lehmann, *Democracy and Development in Latin America*, 58.

⁸¹ O’Donnell, “Corporatism and the Question of the State,” 78; O’Donnell, “Reflections on the Patterns of Change in the Bureaucratic Authoritarian State,” 29.

pull toward the center was indeed the pattern that Southern European transitions followed, as center-right parties took power in Spain and Greece in the first free elections, while the Portuguese transition resulted in a reining in of the broader social revolution that had seemed possible in 1975.

Another defining feature of *Transitions* was its cautious stance toward the revolutionary transformation of post-authoritarian societies. O'Donnell's earlier studies had taught him that the mobilization of the popular sector resulted in the imposition of bureaucratic authoritarianism in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. This history of authoritarian backlash left him skeptical about the viability of transitions led by the maximalist camp. O'Donnell noted the same tragic tradeoff involved in the process of the transition from authoritarianism that preoccupied the Marxist debates about political strategy during the 1970s. Instances of regime collapse during transitions such as those in Portugal, Argentina, and Bolivia condensed the separate processes of liberalization and democratization into a single temporality. They were "more likely to lead to a fuller, less restricted type of political democracy"—a regime type that *possibly* was also more open to further advancements in socio-economic democratization.⁸² But they were *also* more likely to succumb to immediate authoritarian reversals.

Thus, what for Poulantzas' *Crisis of the Dictatorships* was a failed opportunity for a condensed transition from dictatorship to socialism, O'Donnell and Schmitter saw as a reason for advocating a more cautious approach. *Transitions* characterized by the collapse of the state and the victory of the maximalist opposition (what Poulantzas would call ruptures), as was the case in Argentina in 1973 and Portugal in 1974, were more volatile and prone to authoritarian reversion. Being more likely to exclude the dominant classes and the armed forces, they were also more likely to lead to "unmediated confrontations between parties, factions, and organized

⁸² O'Donnell, "Introduction to the Latin American Cases," 8-9.

interests.”⁸³ This crisis of the state was a “prerevolutionary juncture” that impeded its abilities to guarantee the relations of domination and the capitalist relations of production. The risk of pursuing the experiment through to the end made the bourgeoisie’s resort to military measures highly likely, and thus O’Donnell and Schmitter maintained that bourgeois privileges such as property rights and control over the workforce, as well as the rights and privileges of the armed forces, needed to be left largely untouched in order to avoid the risk of an authoritarian backlash.⁸⁴

Since the transition period was characterized by a fundamental instability and shifting dynamism, O’Donnell and Schmitter maintained that liberalization also enabled new actors to come onto the political scene, and allowed for the reemergence of political parties and the politicized resurrection of civil society. O’Donnell had always emphasized that bureaucratic-authoritarianism had “postponed the economic demands of the popular sector, depoliticizing it, and subordinating or destroying the class organizations that had become more autonomous during the praetorian period” of the 1930s-50s.⁸⁵ However, the sudden reemergence of a previously atomized and divided civil society during the transition period risked disrupting the delicate balance of interests being negotiated by the regime and the opposition. In particular, the revitalized working class and trade unions, as well as the larger popular upsurge of *el pueblo* as in the Portuguese case, posed the greatest challenge to the transitional regime once they demanded measures such as class representation, labor legislation, and welfare policies. As O’Donnell and Schmitter wrote, “an active, militant, and highly mobilized popular upsurge may be an efficacious instrument for bringing down a dictatorship but may make subsequent democratic consolidation difficult,” if not altogether responsible for outright regression to

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ O’Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, 69.

⁸⁵ O’Donnell, “Corporatism and the Question of the State,” 69.

authoritarianism.⁸⁶ In non-revolutionary transitions, the left had “to sacrifice, or at least to postpone for an undefined period, the goal of a radical, ‘advanced democratic’ transformation.”⁸⁷

O’Donnell thus diverged from the more radical inclinations of contemporary Marxism by not advocating the necessity of a revolutionary break or rupture for the transition—a political stance dating back to his Argentinian experience. In terms of policy, independent research centers like O’Donnell’s CEDES had tended to combine an analysis of the bureaucratic authoritarian state with a gradualist, social-democratic set of “moderate prescriptions which conformed with the expectations of foreign policy institutions...[in] advocating a gradual liberalization, and even negotiation with the most enlightened segments of the ruling elite.”⁸⁸ Because elite consensus and negotiation played the most proximate and influential role in the liberalization of authoritarian regimes, later evaluations of *Transitions* observed that it largely excluded mass mobilization from their explanation of the dynamics of regime change. Some argued that its tempered version of “realistic democracy” was premised on a form of bad faith, which insisted on the democratic credentials of post-authoritarian regimes despite recognizing the constraints imposed on them by the military and international capital.⁸⁹ Others suggested that it provided “virtually no analysis of the struggles of the popular classes or of the activities of the radical left outside of the formal liberalization process and electoral arena,” and treated transitions as political processes largely managed and negotiated between the elites of the regime and the opposition.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ O’Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, 65, 53-56

⁸⁷ O’Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, 63.

⁸⁸ Guillhot, *The Democracy Makers*, 136-137, 126.

⁸⁹ James F. Petras and Frank T. Fitzgerald, “Authoritarianism and Democracy in the Transition to Socialism,” *Latin American Perspectives* 56 (1988): 93-111.

⁹⁰ Arthur MacEwan, “Review of ‘Transitions from Authoritarian Rule’” *Latin American Perspectives* 15 (1988): 121.

So far we have noted some of the clear differences between the decidedly political and agency-oriented account given in *Transitions* and the class-based, structural accounts of contemporary neo-Marxism. However, it would be incorrect to say that these approaches were diametrically opposed. In fact, one can still notice definite traces of neo-Marxist state theory in some aspects of the project, not least of all due to the prior influence of this literature on O'Donnell, Cardoso, and Przeworski, among others. As Guilhot himself noted, “the analysis of conflicts within ruling blocs that would become a distinctive feature of the ‘transitions to democracy’ approach can be directly traced back to a structural analysis of the state as the coalition of potentially divergent class interests.”⁹¹

While *Transitions* largely dropped the structural analysis of the state from consideration in favor of a more immediate and pressing concern with specific regimes, it was still working with an understanding of the state as a fragmentary relation that sought to mediate competing class and ideological interests. As Lehmann notes, O'Donnell's work immediately prior to *Transitions* suggested that the exercise of class power on the basis of the state also made the latter inherently fragmented: “The fragmentation of the state apparatus combined with corporatism produces an image of an apparatus which has decentralization and parcellization built into it.”⁹² This same fragmentation also created the conditions for the formation of new coalitions and alliances that challenged the existing hegemony of authoritarian regimes, opening the potential pathways for their liberalization.

The contours of O'Donnell's account overlapped with Poulantzas' analysis in *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*. For Poulantzas, the very unity of state power was internally contradictory. Insofar as the capitalist state was a condensation of social forces, and thus riven with competing

⁹¹ Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers*, 161.

⁹² Lehmann, *Democracy and Development in Latin America*, 55.

class, ideological, and political positions, the dictatorships were not homogenous or monolithic regimes counterposed to society. Instead, the “various apparatuses and branches of these regimes certainly allow the different components of the power bloc to be present within the state, reflecting the contradictions between them as internal contradictions of the regime, and particularly of its dominant apparatus, the armed forces.”⁹³ In contrast to fascist regimes, which were able to maintain cohesion through the mass party and the policy, the dictatorships lacked these integrative mechanisms. As O’Donnell’s concurrent analysis of bureaucratic-authoritarianism pointed out, the dictatorships involuntarily concentrated in themselves the contradictions between international capitalism and the domestic class struggle, leaving the popular masses with the opportunity to intervene to bring about their demise.⁹⁴

O’Donnell’s structural account of the state as a social relation of domination also provided some of the conceptual tools for theorizing the dynamics of transitions between regimes. Recall that O’Donnell understood the state as “primarily a condensation of relations of social domination, and...only secondarily as a set of bureaucratic institutions.”⁹⁵ This meant that the state was the undergirding component of a broader social relationship, and could maintain a continuity even during instances of regime change.⁹⁶ Had the state been treated as a set of bureaucratic institutions (as in the “politician” accounts that O’Donnell criticized), *Transitions*

⁹³ Poulantzas, *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, 49.

⁹⁴ For an insightful and thorough set of analyses of the Southern European transitions building on Poulantzas, see Ronald H. Chilcote et al. *Transitions from Dictatorship to Democracy: Comparative Studies of Spain, Portugal, and Greece* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1990).

⁹⁵ O’Donnell, “Notes for the Study of Processes of Political Democratization in the wake of the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State,” 128n21.

⁹⁶ Confusingly, at one point O’Donnell noted that “the BA has a political regime, though usually not a formally institutionalized one, that may outlive this kind of state itself” (“Notes for the Study of Processes of Political Democratization,” 112). This formulation seems to directly contradict his otherwise consistent definitions of both regime and state. For this reason, I take this formulation to mean that, *if* there is an instance where BA regime *should* outlive a BA state, this would be a temporary and exceptional moment, as the regime would collapse without the underlying social order that the state guarantees.

would have run into a set of larger theoretical difficulties. Pacted transitions from authoritarianism were conservative in the sense that they could not overturn the social order that the state held together and represented, least of all by a change in the personnel in charge of the state apparatuses. The distinction between state, regime, and government thus allowed O'Donnell and Schmitter to circumscribe their account to liberalization and democratization, rather than the entire social order as a whole. Contrary to later readings that argued *Transitions* did not sufficiently distinguish between state and regime, it is clear that this was an important distinction on which both the normative and analytic components of their account was premised.⁹⁷

O'Donnell's conception of the state as a social relation also resonated in *Transitions* when it came to explaining the mobilization of civil society. For Poulantzas the popular struggles were the determining, although not the direct or principal, factors in the Southern European transitions.⁹⁸ As we saw above, O'Donnell and Schmitter assigned to civil society a largely peripheral role in the transition. However, for O'Donnell popular struggles also traversed the state; as Lehmann put it, "the state creates the classes and is shaped and misshapen by their struggle, but it is not 'set apart' from civil society."⁹⁹ For example, in his earlier analysis of bureaucratic-authoritarianism, O'Donnell did argue that "a serious challenge to the BA cannot be mobilized without the participation of the popular sector," in terms of the necessary reconstruction of alliances uniting against the regime.¹⁰⁰ The anti-popular origins of the bureaucratic-authoritarian state, its openness to transnational capital, and its shrinking of the political arena all left it devoid of the mechanisms of legitimation and succession that were a

⁹⁷ Robert M. Fishman, "Rethinking State and Regime: Southern Europe's Transition to Democracy," *World Politics* 42 (1990): 422-440.

⁹⁸ Poulantzas, *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, 78

⁹⁹ Lehmann, *Democracy and Development in Latin America*, 55, 56.

¹⁰⁰ O'Donnell, "Reflections on the Patterns of Change in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State," 8.

crucial part of the state's role.¹⁰¹ It was during this moment that the revitalization of civil society became a key factor, for it “determines the rhythm of the transition no less than the events within the state apparatus,” which itself now becomes “penetrated by reverberations of the repoliticization of society.”¹⁰² The illegitimacy of the bureaucratic-authoritarian state, coupled with an external shock such as economic stagnation or crisis, could potentially lead fractions of the domestic bourgeoisie to shift toward the center, or to a broadly populist or cross-class alliance for the joint objective of replacing dictatorships with democratic regimes. While Poulantzas noted the “conjunctural and tactical convergence of interests between the domestic bourgeoisie on the one hand, and the working class and popular masses on the other” with the hope that the latter could play the leading role in the transitions, O'Donnell and Schmitter maintained that this alliance needed to occur under the hegemony of the domestic bourgeoisie.¹⁰³

Finally, and more generally, *Transitions* shared with neo-Marxist accounts its emphasis on structural indeterminacy and conjunctural forces for explaining the dynamics of regime change: peculiar historical circumstances, political timing, the abilities and judgment of political leaders, interactive processes, and unintended consequences. For O'Donnell and Schmitter, transitions from authoritarianism were anything but foregone conclusions; liberalization and democratization were *not* irreversible, but highly contingent and underdetermined by a multitude of factors, both on the level of elite and group choices, and the level of large scale socio-economic processes. As they never tired of repeating, reversions to authoritarianism were just as possible, if not even more likely than democratic consolidation—let alone to socialization as “deeper” form of democracy. For that very reason, O'Donnell argued that political democracy

¹⁰¹ O'Donnell, “Notes for the Study of Processes of Political Democratization in the wake of the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State,” 127n12.

¹⁰² O'Donnell, “Notes for the Study of Processes of Political Democratization in the wake of the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State,” 123.

¹⁰³ Poulantzas, *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, 58.

was desirable despite the “significant trade-offs that its installation and eventual consolidation can entail in terms of more effective, and more rapid, opportunities for reducing social and economic inequalities.” There was no “*via revolucionaria* open for countries that have reached some minimal degree of stateness and social complexity” that came with the development of capitalist social relations.¹⁰⁴

This anti-teleological approach dovetailed with Poulantzas’ conception of the relative autonomy of the political, and the disjuncture between the economic and political levels, for as he wrote, “the overthrow of the dictatorships is possible even without the process of democratization being telescoped together with a process of transition to national socialism and national liberation.”¹⁰⁵ For comparison, these authors shared a standpoint opposed to certain Eurocommunist authors like Santiago Carrillo, for whom the potential transition from dictatorship to socialism was a relatively linear result of the monopoly phase of capitalism, and the policies of socialization that it enabled. Instead, along with Poulantzas, O’Donnell and Schmitter’s account shared in the conclusion that was concurrently made by Göran Therborn, who claimed that “Democracy is not *the* polity of a particular stage in the development of capitalism, but a conjunctural outcome”—with the important caveat that while for Therborn democracy was “not a bourgeois or ‘middle-class’ creation, but the result of contradictions and conflict within capitalism,” the analysis of capitalism and class was largely absent from O’Donnell and Schmitter.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ O’Donnell, “Introduction to the Latin American Cases,” 10.

¹⁰⁵ Poulantzas, *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, 66.

¹⁰⁶ Göran Therborn, “The Travails of Latin American Democracy,” *New Left Review* I, 113/114 (1979): 96. Therborn’s piece also noted O’Donnell’s *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism* as tinged by “an evolutionistic framework typical of North American sociological jargon,” and his “Reflections on the Patterns of Change in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State,” as a more “subtle and penetrating” analysis (108fn64).

Therefore, although the language of the state was largely absent from O'Donnell and Schmitter's account, it was present in the theoretical framework through which they approached transitions as political challenges. For them, transitions *necessarily* involved an ongoing engagement with the question of the state, even if they were not preoccupied with it explicitly as an analytic object. Nevertheless, the general problematic of the state (and of the capitalist state, more specifically) was unavoidable throughout *Transitions*.

III. Transitions Beyond Polyarchy

As we have seen, O'Donnell and Schmitter mostly omitted the “deepening” of political democracy from the concluding volume of *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* due to the high risk these initiatives caused of an authoritarian backslide. Their emphasis on pact-making among elite actors largely isolated the political level from the broader struggle for what they called “socialization.” Therefore, it has been observed that “for the editors of *Transitions*, the transition process ends when open elections and rights of opposition have been established.”¹⁰⁷ As O'Donnell himself would later acknowledge, “the first and most important problem was getting rid of authoritarian rule and arriving at political democracy understood in terms similar to Robert Dahl's polyarchy, that is, clean and competitive elections along with certain basic liberties: freedom of opinion and movement; freedom to form and belong to associations including political parties; and access to information that is not monopolized by the state.”¹⁰⁸

While their analysis borrowed contemporary neo-Marxist insights about the fragmentary character of authoritarianism, the importance of political leadership, and the essentially conjunctural nature of democracy as a regime, the normative goal of *Transitions* led them to emphasize the autonomy of politics in exceptional circumstances. However, some of the themes

¹⁰⁷ MacEwan, “Review of *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*,” 123.

¹⁰⁸ O'Donnell, “Preface” to *Counterpoints*, xv.

outlined in *Transitions* in fact also speak to the possibility of a second transition. Here one can again find important overlaps between O'Donnell and Schmitter and their contemporary neo-Marxist and Eurocommunist debates, as well as a running theme that preoccupied O'Donnell in his writings over the course of the 1990s and 2000s.

The cautious approach of *Transitions* led Guilhot to remark that it settled on the “irreversibility of capitalistic relations of production [and] the impossibility of implementing even moderate Keynesian arrangements in the context of a powerful international economic orthodoxy.”¹⁰⁹ For example, the Portuguese transition initially saw measures that included the expropriation of the upper bourgeoisie and the nationalization of land. However, the Chilean experience led the Portuguese Communist Party to adopt a more incremental approach that sought an alliance with the urban and rural middle classes. This halted the ascendance of the radical left by late 1975, and allowed for the emergence of the more moderate Socialists as the representative party of the left.¹¹⁰ Thus, even though the constitution of 1976 committed the country to a “transition to socialism,” the revolutionary movement was unable to step outside of the capitalist relations of production and this project soon gave way to a “liberal bourgeois/social democratic consensus.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers*, 138. As Przeworski wrote in plain terms, “We cannot avoid the possibility that a transition to democracy can be made only at the cost of leaving economic relations intact, not only the structure of production but even the distribution of income” (“Some Problems in the Study of the Transition to Democracy,” in *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule* Vol. III: *Comparative Perspectives*, 63).

¹¹⁰ See Maxwell, “Regime Overthrow and the Prospects for Democratic Transition in Portugal,” 119. For a synopsis of the then-contemporary literature on Portuguese and Spanish transitions, see Benny Pollack and Jim Taylor, “The Transition to Democracy in Portugal and Spain,” *British Journal of Political Science* 13 (1983): 209-242.

¹¹¹ O'Donnell, “Notes for the Study of Processes of Political Democratization in the wake of the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State,” 117-118; Schmitter, “An Introduction to Southern European Transitions from Authoritarian Rule,” 8.

Even so, O'Donnell and Schmitter observed that this consensus and the “relatively stable mix of liberalization and democratization” captured in the model of polyarchy rested on a socio-economic compromise regarding income shares and property rights.¹¹² They briefly acknowledged that the advent of political democracy would open new spheres of life to political contestation, including issues of citizenship and redistribution of resources. They referred to this as “socialization,” meaning an expansion of the rights and liberties guaranteed by political democracy to include social democracy and economic democracy. By social democracy was meant making citizens in a variety of civic and occupational institutions “actors with equal rights and obligations to decide what actions these institutions should take,” while by economic democracy was meant the provision of equal material benefits to the population from out of socially produced goods, as well as immaterial benefits like autonomy, respect, prestige, and self-development.¹¹³ Yet their observation that higher levels of participation and redistribution could also have adverse effects on political democracy, as well as the more immediate problem of strengthening the new post-transitions regimes, led them to mostly sidestep this topic in favor of an emphasis on liberalization and democratization.

In positing that socialization would most likely require a popular authoritarian regime, O'Donnell and Schmitter introduced a two-stage theory of transition, indefinitely delaying the second stage until the first had been sufficiently consolidated.¹¹⁴ As they wrote at the time, “Political democracy per se is a goal worthy of attainment, even at the expense of forgoing

¹¹² This same implicit consensus regarding property rights and income in polyarchic regimes was a running theme in Miliband's critique of pluralism and its hidden biases in *The State in Capitalist Society*.

¹¹³ O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions*, 12.

¹¹⁴ Nicolas Guilhot, “The Transition to the Human World of Democracy: Notes for a Theory of the Concept of Transition, from Early Marxism to 1989,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5 (2002): 219-243.

alternate paths that would seem to promise more immediate returns in terms of socialization.”¹¹⁵

What were these alternate paths? The most apparent was the *via revolucionaria* pursued during the Carnation Revolution. Yet as we have seen, they rejected the Portuguese attempt to collapse the liberalization/democratization and socialization aspects of the transition into a single temporality.

O'Donnell and Schmitter were writing from a political and theoretical context where Eurocommunism presented an alternate path to socialization that briefly appeared viable during the mid to late 1970s. Here it is worth mentioning that although Eurocommunism does not figure prominently in the discussions, this attempted reorientation of radical politics in Western and Southern Europe did not elude the contributors to *Transitions*. For example, Stepan noted that the rise of Italian Eurocommunism was one of the factors in the decline of Marxist-Leninist revolutionary ideology, while Salvador Giner complimented its commitment to the social-democratic maintenance of welfare capitalism and political pluralism.¹¹⁶ But more importantly, the various tendencies within Eurocommunism all attempted to reevaluate the relationship between political strategy and the state with regard to the transition to socialism. For that reason, a brief discussion of this topic can clarify what concurrent theories of transition were being explored, and provide evidence that these discussions about the democratization of the state and economy would eventually resonate in O'Donnell's later writings.

Like the neo-Marxist debates about the capitalist state to which they were closely tied, Eurocommunist discussions struggled with the absence of a systematic theory of transition and the state in the works of Marx. While they converged on the idea that a transition had to occur

¹¹⁵ O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions*, 13-14.

¹¹⁶ Alfred Stepan, "Paths toward Redemocratization: Theoretical and Comparative Considerations," in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* Vol. III, 83-84; Giner, "Political Economy, Legitimation, and the State," 34.

from within the framework of the bourgeois-democratic state, they ranged across a spectrum in which conceptions of the state were closely bound up with the question of political strategy.¹¹⁷ For Therborn, the “strategy for socialism or for a transitional stage of ‘advanced democracy’ must dismantle the government, administration, judicial and repressive apparatus of the existing bourgeois state” to bring about “a political programme of changes in the organization of the state that will bring about a popular democracy.”¹¹⁸ In Italy, debates about the state ranged from accounts such as Lucio Colletti’s, that saw democracy and the state as contradictory terms and thus argued there was no such thing as a socialist state, to those of Norberto Bobbio, who saw political democracy and the democratization of the state as the starting point for the democratization of society.¹¹⁹ Among Spanish communists, Santiago Carrillo and Fernando Claudin provided different accounts of both the relationship between the state and capitalism, and the proper role of the PCE. And in France, the debate over the dictatorship of the proletariat, including Balibar’s defense of the concept and Poulantzas’ critique of that position, reflected the largely orthodox character of the PCF’s internal politics.

On the Eurocommunist right, the dominant tendency of the PCF and the PCE had maintained that the state apparatus was an instrument of the ruling class, and thus of monopoly capital.¹²⁰ According to this thesis, postwar capitalism had suffered from a crisis of over-accumulation and an inability to realize surplus value; as a result, the necessary intervention by the state to restore profitability brought about a fusion between the political and economic

¹¹⁷ For example, see Jonas Pontusson, “Gramsci and Eurocommunism: A Comparative Analysis of Conceptions of Class Rule and Socialist Transition,” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 24/25 (1980): 185-248.

¹¹⁸ Therborn, *What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules?* 25.

¹¹⁹ See Carnoy, *Political Theory and the State*, 153-171.

¹²⁰ See Carrillo, *Eurocommunism and the State*, 13, 21.

spheres.¹²¹ Postwar capitalist development had concentrated monopoly capital within the state, creating the opening for an anti-monopoly alliance composed of the proletariat, farmers, traders, and professional groups to articulate a common social interest against the state.¹²² The road to socialism involved combining democratic mass action with party activity within representative institutions, to “use in the service of socialism of the representative democratic instruments which today basically serve capitalism.”¹²³

The problem with such approaches, as pointed out by Poulantzas, was that they largely treated the state apparatus as an empty center of power that could be given content by a new class coalition.¹²⁴ In *State, Power, Socialism* and other writings from the period, he advanced his own modified conception of the capitalist state as “the condensation of a relationship of forces between classes and class fractions, such as these express themselves, in a necessarily specific form, *within the State* itself.” The intensity the class struggle in a given moment also turned the state into a contested field that always needed to take into account the interests of the dominated classes, and did not always successfully integrate them into the reproduction of the social order. As a result, the state was an entity where class contradictions were “present in its material framework and pattern its organization.”¹²⁵ Theorizing the capitalist state as a condensation of class forces allowed Poulantzas not only to maintain his opposition to the more reformist approach of Carrillo and the PCE, but also to Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. Lenin’s treatment of the state as a “monolithic bloc without divisions, with almost no internal contradictions, and

¹²¹ Benton, *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism*, 153-154.

¹²² Carrillo, *Eurocommunism and the State*, 24-25.

¹²³ Carrillo, *Eurocommunism and the State*, 51.

¹²⁴ This view was also the basis of the Leninist critique of Eurocommunism as doing away with the distinction between state and government. Eurocommunist strategy was thus said to ignore how the relative autonomy of the state apparatus allowed it to oppose parliamentary governments elected on a socialist or communist platform and stifle the implementation of socialist policies. See Benton, *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism*, 156.

¹²⁵ Poulantzas, *State Power Socialism*, 132/

which can only be attacked globally and frontally from without by establishing the counter-state,” in the form of soviets, may have been appropriate for dealing with the repressive Tsarist state, but appeared increasingly outmoded for dealing with the dispersed political, economic, and ideological apparatuses of postwar liberal-capitalism.¹²⁶

If the state was a condensation or relation of class forces, the boundaries between state and civil society were much more permeable. From this permeability, Poulantzas rejected both an exclusive reliance on the parliamentary reformism of the social democratic parties and the militant strategy of building dual power. Instead, he put forward a dual conception of the class struggle in the democratic transition to socialism involving both an organized, electoral struggle on the terrain of the state’s political and ideological apparatuses, and mass struggle outside the institutions and apparatuses of the state leveraging the structures of direct democracy at the base of the movement. On one hand, the struggle within the state needed to sharpen its internal contradictions and with the goal of a deep transformation, including the replacement of the agents of the bourgeoisie with those of the democratic masses. On the other, a parallel struggle would be organized outside of the state apparatuses, using the organs of popular power to exert continuous pressure on state institutions.¹²⁷ Thus, representative democracy on the level of the state would be complemented by a direct democratic struggle originating outside of the state.

The transition to socialism could eventually be brought about by a “*stage of real breaks*, the climax of which – and there has to be one – is reached when the relationship of forces on the strategic terrain of the State swings over to the side of the popular masses.”¹²⁸ Yet Poulantzas warned that rushing into ruptural breaks and pursuing the more militant strategies advocated by the orthodox wings of the Communist parties would doom a mass movement to failure, for no

¹²⁶ Poulantzas, “The State and the Transition to Socialism,” 334.

¹²⁷ Poulantzas, “The State and the Transition to Socialism,” 338-341.

¹²⁸ Poulantzas, *State Power Socialism*, 258-259.

capitalist state, not even one undergoing a crisis such as Portugal in 1974, would allow the establishment of a dual power without first resorting to a military intervention. For that reason, the left needed to refrain from immediately dismantling the state's economic apparatus, which would only paralyze the state and mobilize the bourgeoisie in opposition.¹²⁹

In the postwar period, the communist parties in Western Europe had already been peacefully coexisting within multiparty systems. The Eurocommunist turn made it explicit that a democratic transition to socialism required the acceptance of a plurality of parties. This inherently swung the balance of power in favor of the status quo and risked the stagnation of the movement into parliamentary reformism. To counteract this tendency and prevent social-democratic stagnation, Poulantzas maintained that the far left needed to act as an external catalyst to parliamentary alliances such as the short-lived French Common Program between the PCF and the Socialist Party of 1972-1977.¹³⁰ Claudin too had envisioned a “system of multiple, shifting alliances and convergences” between political parties, trade unions, and other mass movements—in other words, a diverse political alliance not led by the party of the working class but by a plurality of actors on the political scene.¹³¹ This dual strategy would displace the working class and the communist party as *the* single privileged subject of the struggle, in place of an alliance of the popular classes, including such previously “secondary” concerns as the feminist and ecological movements. This openness to communist alliances with socialist, social democratic, and progressive Christian forces initially resulted in successes for Eurocommunist parties during the mid-1970s. Aside from the French Common Program, in Italy the PCI entered into the “historic compromise” with the Christian Democrats, winning a third of the popular vote in June 1976 and entering the governing majority for the first time in thirty years. In Spain, the

¹²⁹ Poulantzas, *State Power Socialism*, 198.

¹³⁰ Poulantzas, “The State and the Transition to Socialism,” 359.

¹³¹ Claudin, *Eurocommunism and Socialism*, 127.

PCE immediately became a factor on the political scene in the liberalization that followed in the wake of Franco's death. A 1977 summit in Madrid (even prior to the PCE's legalization) seemed to have put these national communist parties on a common political and ideological path.¹³²

Along with the acceptance of representative democracy and party competition, another important premise of Eurocommunism was a newfound support for the "formal" bourgeois liberties that characterized the political systems of the advanced capitalist states. If the political liberties and social advances won by the working classes in postwar Europe were a sign that these regimes were essentially open to reform and a deepening of their formal democracies, then the task of communist parties was not to advocate for the destruction of the state apparatuses but for a gradualist strategy by which the state would be surrounded and penetrated by a new hegemonic coalition, leading to its transformation. Poulantzas' vision of a ruptural transformation of the bourgeois state required the deepening and extension of these formal liberties and representative institutions, including preserving the plurality of parties and national assemblies elected by secret, universal suffrage, rather than their abolition in favor of a more direct democratic mechanisms.

Some Marxists had already adopted this view by the late 1960s. In *The State in Capitalist Society* and in his critique of Poulantzas, Miliband warned against the dismissal of "bourgeois freedoms," which he argued risked leading to a collapsing of the "wide gulf between 'bourgeois democracy' and the various forms of conservative authoritarianism, most notably Fascism."¹³³ Rather than dismissing these freedoms, as Balibar and Colletti did, Miliband maintained that they needed to be deepened and extended through a transformation of the economic, social, and

¹³² With regard to France and Italy, O'Donnell and Schmitter noted that the prospective presence of the Communist parties in governing coalitions unnerved voters. In France, the Socialist Party's electoral breakthrough in 1981 only took place once they became a larger force than the Communists.

¹³³ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 267.

political conditions that otherwise reduced them to their formal and precarious status. Miliband held out faint hope that the political conditions in Italy and France could give rise to internally open and democratic working-class parties that could cultivate this political vision.¹³⁴ Later, he wrote that a partnership between state power and class power in a socialist society would be characterized by “the achievement of real power by organs of popular representation in all spheres of life, from the workplace to local government,” and involve “the thorough democratization of the state system and the strengthening of democratic control upon every aspect of it.” In such a context, the state would not be dismantled or replaced by a dictatorship of the proletariat, but remain in place to protect personal, civil, and political freedoms, and to mediate between the fractions that made up the new hegemonic majority.¹³⁵

Despite their internal differences, Eurocommunist and neo-Marxist debates had addressed the possible transition to socialism against the background of both existing liberal-democratic regimes and the capitalist state that sustained them. With the exception of the Southern European cases, they were largely concerned with the potential of political transformations occurring from within polyarchies, defined as “relatively (but incompletely) democratized regimes...that have been substantially popularized and liberalized, that is, highly inclusive and extensively open to public contestation.”¹³⁶ Dahl’s qualification of *incompletely* democratized regimes is noteworthy, since the deepening and extension of democracy within polyarchies became O’Donnell’s main preoccupation during the 1990s and 2000s. While O’Donnell’s process-driven and actor-centered approach during the 1980s led him to emphasize

¹³⁴ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 275.

¹³⁵ Miliband, “State Power and Class Interests,” 76-77.

¹³⁶ Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 8. In fact, it has been argued that the vision of democracy in Dahl’s model of polyarchy actually dovetailed with the vision of democratic socialism in Poulantzas, as both pluralist and neo-Marxist authors wished to see institutions of self-management brought together with procedural and formal protections of the rights to participate in government. See Levi, “Review of *State, Power, Socialism*.”

the autonomy of politics, in the following decade this focus on deepening polyarchy returned him to the problem of the state as a social relation, creating another set of thematic affinities between his research and the neo-Marxist and Eurocommunist considerations of liberal democracy of earlier decades.¹³⁷

O'Donnell's research agenda increasingly concentrated on the possibilities and limits of extending democratization to the areas where consolidation was precarious and liable to slip into new, insufficient forms of governance such as delegative democracy.¹³⁸ While O'Donnell and Schmitter treated polyarchy as the temporary end-point of transitions, in the 1990s it became apparent that the newly democratized regimes in Latin America and post-communist Europe were far from the consolidated liberal-democracies that existed in Northwestern Europe and the Anglo-American world.¹³⁹ Democratic regimes such as those of post-authoritarian Latin America were still hindered by ineffective, undemocratic states. Frequently, systems of local and privatized power persisted on the subnational level and in areas where the state had no means of enforcing its guarantees of the rule of law and democratic legality. As O'Donnell wrote, "A strong state, irrespective of the size of its bureaucracies, is one that effectively establishes that legality and that is not perceived by most of the population as just an arena for the pursuit of particularistic interests."¹⁴⁰ In contrast, in cases where the state was easily colonized by private power, its public dimension evaporated, while inegalitarian socioeconomic structures within civil

¹³⁷ See Timothy J. Power, "Theorizing a Moving Target: O'Donnell's Changing Views of Postauthoritarian Regimes." In *Reflections on Uneven Democracies: The Legacy of Guillermo O'Donnell*, eds. Daniel Brinks, Marcelo Leiras, and Scott Mainwaring (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 173-188.

¹³⁸ Guillermo O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (1994): 55-69.

¹³⁹ See especially O'Donnell, "On the State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems: A Latin American View with Glances at Some Postcommunist Countries," "Delegative Democracy," and "Illusions about Consolidation," in *Counterpoints: Selected Essays on Authoritarianism and Democratization*.

¹⁴⁰ O'Donnell, "On the State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems," 137.

society and concentrated bureaucratic power within the state weakened the political and civil rights of citizens. After the Cold War had ended, it was no longer viable to assume that political democratization could lead to democratization in these other spheres. Moreover, even consolidated polyarchies could coexist with *varying* degrees of democratization in the economic, social, and cultural spheres, raising the question of how liberal democracy could be deepened beyond the political level.¹⁴¹ Successful democratic consolidation thus required both an extensive spread and an intensification, expanding democracy beyond the political level to encompass those social, economic, and cultural relationships that were currently the domain of privatized power.

O'Donnell's post-*Transitions* writings became increasingly concerned with the problem of the *democratic state* as contrasted to a democratic regime—a distinction he elaborated in his final book *Democracy, Agency, and the State* through a review and modification of competing explanations. O'Donnell's interest in the state can be seen both as a continuation and a shift of emphasis from the structuralist and dependency-inspired framework that he relied on during the 1970s. On one hand, there was a continuity insofar as he continued to maintain that the state was a set of social relations, referring to it as a

“territorially based association, consisting of sets of institutions and social relations (most of them sanctioned and backed by the legal system of that state), that normally penetrates and controls the territory and the inhabitants it delimits. These institutions claim a monopoly in the legitimate authorization of the use of physical coercion, and normally have, as ultimate resource for implementing the decisions they make, supremacy in the control of the means of coercion over the population and the territory that the state delimits.”¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Guillermo O'Donnell, “Transitions, Continuities, and Paradoxes,” in *Issues in Democratic Consolidation*, eds. Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O'Donnell, and J. Samuel Valenzuela (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 18.

¹⁴² Guillermo O'Donnell, *Democracy, Agency, and the State: Theory with Comparative Intent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 52.

However, while the state was characterized by its establishment of a territorial order backed by a coercive guarantee, this was only one of its dimensions. Consistent with his earlier writings, he rejected the views that exaggerated its unity. He also argued that more concrete studies of institutions and public policies could not conceptually reconstruct the state once it had been disaggregated. O'Donnell continued to maintain that the state was not to be conflated with the state apparatus, the public sector, or the aggregation of public bureaucracies.¹⁴³ The latter placed the state in a zero-sum relationship to society, disembedding its institutions from the social relationships in which they were enmeshed. At the same time, he rejected the anthropological “state as lived experience” approach, since it only treated the state as a projected illusion of the mirrors of domination rather than as a political unity.¹⁴⁴

Along with the neo-Weberian definition of the state as a territorial entity, its other dimensions were as a set of bureaucracies, as a “filter” regulating its spaces and boundaries in relation to the “external” state system, and as a legal system. In particular, O'Donnell concentrated on how the social relations of domination and the state's unity were organized and codified in a legal system. Neither the law nor the state were neutral phenomena that merely administered the public good, but a crystallization of social forces—a “dynamic condensation of power relations” rather than a rational technique.¹⁴⁵ The law created the stable norms and expectations that reproduced asymmetric power relationships within society. Through the legal system the state could put forward the authorizations that gave it both an empirical unity (in the

¹⁴³ O'Donnell, “On the State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems: A Latin American View with Glances at Some Postcommunist Countries,” 135.

¹⁴⁴ O'Donnell, *Democracy, Agency, and the State*, 116-117.

¹⁴⁵ Guillermo O'Donnell, *Dissonances: Democratic Critiques of Democracy* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 130; and Interview with O'Donnell in *Passion, Craft, and Method*, 300. In *Democracy, Agency, and the State* (53), O'Donnell observed that while Poulantzas' treatment of the state as a condensation of power relations and its relative autonomy were insightful, it was conducted at too high a level of generality. Instead, he found Peter Evans' conception of embedded autonomy a more accurate treatment.

form of officials with rights and obligations) and its conceptual unity as *the state* as such.¹⁴⁶ As he wrote elsewhere, “the legal system is a constitutive dimension of the state and of the order that it establishes and guarantees over a given territory;” the law was the “‘part’ of the state which provides the regular, underlying texturing of the social order existing over a given territory.”¹⁴⁷ It supplied the state’s ideological dimension, furnishing the generalized social predictability backed by the state’s public institutions, and made possible the bases of citizenship, including the guarantee and exercise of political rights.

By emphasizing the state as a legal system rather than a set of apparatuses, O’Donnell sought to develop a normative critique of contemporary democratic theory and the scholarship on democratization. The minimalist conceptions of democracy drawing upon Schumpeter and Dahl that dominated Anglo-American comparative politics understood democracy as a regime characterized by reasonably fair elections and a set of guaranteed rights and political freedoms, including those of expression, association, movement, and the access to information.¹⁴⁸ However, these definitions in terms of political variables and electoral competition missed the degree to which democratization was a *process* advanced by a rearrangement of the balance of forces between state and society. Attributes such as “authoritarian” and “democratic” needed to be considered not simply as components of regimes, but of states.¹⁴⁹ As he put it, “I see democracy as going beyond the regime to include various aspects of the state and society...democracy is more than just the regime.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ O’Donnell, *Democracy, Agency, and the State*, 118-119.

¹⁴⁷ O’Donnell, “On the State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems,” 135.

¹⁴⁸ Guillermo O’Donnell, “The Perpetual Crises of Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 18 (2007): 7.

¹⁴⁹ O’Donnell, “On the State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems,” 141.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with O’Donnell, *Passion, Craft and Method*, 295-296. An informative discussion for these points is also found in Sebastian Mazzuca, “O’Donnell and the Study of Latin American Politics After the Transitions,” *Studia Politicae* 26 (2012): 99-125.

Therefore, O'Donnell argued that democracy needed to be analyzed at the level of the state understood as a legal system, *along with* that of a coercive power and a set of administrative bureaucracies. The shift of focus to a democratic state governed by the rule of law allowed him to incorporate an account of the legal system as the underlying relationship that enacted and backed the democratic regime, and so provide a more complete account of the relationship between legal and political rights and societal inequalities. Because political and democratic citizenship presupposed the state as both a form of territorial delimitation and a legal system, the state was one of the key analytical aspects for examining the successes and setbacks of democratization.¹⁵¹ Only this multifaceted view of the state could get at the proper analysis of the rule of law and citizenship that interested him throughout his career, but became most prominent in his final writings.

O'Donnell's interest in the socially transformative power of democratic citizenship dates back to his writings of the 1970s. While the abstract equality of citizenship granted by the capitalist state concealed substantive inequalities and was maintained as a form of social domination for the reproduction of capitalist social relations, it was also inherently ambiguous. As he wrote in *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism*, in certain conjunctures, "citizenship and political democracy entail mechanisms and entitlements that often permit the dominated classes to carve out social and political spaces from which to articulate demands and realize interests."¹⁵² And as he noted elsewhere during the same time, it was precisely *because* the bureaucratic authoritarian state lacked popular legitimacy and originated from a fear of the popular sector that the specter of democracy haunted it throughout. Should the BA state attempt to implement a gradual, top-down liberalization, the issue of democracy was "liable to be expropriated by giving the term

¹⁵¹ O'Donnell, *Dissonances*, 16.

¹⁵² O'Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism*, 5-6.

meanings that supersede the limitations and qualifications” of the regime’s proponents. A politics pushing beyond controlled, limited democracy would be “a struggle for the appropriation and redefinition of the meaning of democracy” by those currently excluded by the bureaucratic authoritarian state.¹⁵³ When introduced into the authoritarian context, the *indefinite* demand for political democracy played a crucial role in opening up the channels for a further democratization beyond what appeared possible within the conjuncture.

Here we can already note a fundamental point that O’Donnell maintained in his later writing: that democracy was an essentially contested concept that was the key with which to analyze the relationship between citizens and the state. Conceptualizing democracy meant neither restricting it to “exclusively political factors” nor expanding it to the point of it being a synonym of “social justice or economic equality;” rather, the *problematique* of citizenship needed to be used as a means of pursuing a “democratic critique of our current polyarchies.”¹⁵⁴ Calling the practice of democracy “an act of collective self-pedagogy,” O’Donnell wrote that democratization is an “unending movement, always alienable and reversible, towards more dense dialogical networks inhabited by more firmly entitled agents; it consists of the continuing critical re-appropriation of the true origin, meaning, and justification of the powers secreted by society, and condensed, processed, and returned by the state and the government.”¹⁵⁵

O’Donnell’s later treatment of the state as a legal system therefore allowed him to re-theorize the relationship between the state and political agency in a way that neither his structural work on bureaucratic authoritarianism nor the agency-oriented focus of *Transitions* fully

¹⁵³ O’Donnell, “Tensions in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State and the Question of Democracy”, 317.

¹⁵⁴ O’Donnell, *Counterpoints*, xvii-xix. It is interesting to note that the “democratic critique” of contemporary democracy through the lens of citizenship is today also the preoccupation of Etienne Balibar. See for example his recent *Equaliberty: Political Essays* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), in which the extension of Poulantzas’ work to address citizenship is discussed on 145-164.

¹⁵⁵ O’Donnell, *Democracy, Agency, and the State*, 143.

captured. As a legal system, the democratic state *constituted* citizens as political agents—legal persons and bearers of rights—who, by virtue of their political recognition, could then pursue further egalitarian demands.¹⁵⁶ The formal, political rights granted to citizens in democratic states were also the basic foundation on which the struggle for more substantive rights could occur. These demands included the claims made by various forms of social citizenship, horizontal accountability among different state institutions, and the overcoming of particularism in the recognition of equal rights and liberties for all citizens. The expansion of the legal state as the democratic rule of law would strengthen society and empower the agency of citizens.¹⁵⁷ By claiming inalienable rights on the basis of their political, civil, cultural, and social citizenship, political agents always projected an open horizon toward greater democratization.

It is important to emphasize that O'Donnell did not view the achievement of political democracy in the wake of authoritarianism as just an incomplete and inadequate transitional stage to *true* democracy; he consistently maintained that political democracy was a good in its own right. But both in his older and recent writings, he never closed the door on the notion that political democracy could be a viable route for “the expansion of democracy and social and economic levels.”¹⁵⁸ This is apparent in older writings, such as the 1979 postscript to *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism*, where he argued that the introduction and consolidation of (political) democracy, “must include substantial progress toward social, economic, and cultural democratization,” and that advancement of these democratic values would be “some form of socialism whose precise characteristics cannot be discerned today either

¹⁵⁶ O'Donnell, *Dissonances*, 61.

¹⁵⁷ O'Donnell, *Dissonances*, 130-131.

¹⁵⁸ O'Donnell, “Notes for the Study of Processes of Political Democratization in the wake of the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State,” 110.

from the armchair or from the conjuncture of defeat.”¹⁵⁹ And it is apparent in his 2007 essay “The Perpetual Crises of Democracy,” where, in his own words, “democracy is more than a valuable kind of political arrangement. It is also often the notorious sign of a lack. It is the *perpetual absence of something more*, of an always pending agenda that calls for the redress of social ills and further advances in the manifold matters which, at a certain time and for certain people, most concern human welfare and dignity.”¹⁶⁰

This emphasis on democratization *through* (and one might say, *of*) the state was radically different from the more sober and “realist” accounts of liberal democracy as a regime. Instead, it pointed to a conception of democracy as an perpetually unfinished political and social project, driven by the demands and needs that citizens and political agents made on the state, and received back from it in a process of mutual interdependence. Once again, the state became the essential prerequisite for political agency, both defining its limits and serving as a target toward which political practice could be oriented.

IV. Reconsidering *Transitions*

By situating *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* and the writings of Guillermo O’Donnell in a broader intellectual and political context alongside contemporaneous neo-Marxist discussions, I have sought to reinterpret a key research project in the field of comparative democratization within American political science. Because of its substantial impact on later scholarship within this field, *Transitions* served as one of the bridges between the macro-historical and state-oriented research agenda of the 1960s-1970s and the “new institutionalism”

¹⁵⁹ O’Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism*, 205-206.

¹⁶⁰ O’Donnell, “The Perpetual Crises of Democracy,” 9.

that began to take hold in American political science during the 1990s and beyond.¹⁶¹ As we have seen, it is commonly argued that the model of political transitions building on O'Donnell and Schmitter's work adopted an actor-based rather than a structural perspective, tending to see transitions occurring as the outcome of elites' strategic interactions and negotiations, and thus privileging "individual elites rather than *collective* actors, strategically defined actors rather than *class-defined* actors, and state actors more than *societal* actors."¹⁶²

On the one hand, *Transitions*' emphasis on political agency, situated decision-making, and elite bargaining did lead the structural dimensions of the state to fade into the background. However, I have argued that when this research initiative is contextualized alongside both O'Donnell's pre and post-*Transitions* scholarship, we can also notice important continuities in his work regarding a common set of questions and problems related to authoritarianism, democracy, and the state. In addition, I have sought to show that the intellectual origins of *Transitions* can be traced back to the same political debates about the transitions from authoritarianism to liberal democracy and to socialism that also preoccupied neo-Marxist and Eurocommunist debates of that time. Placing it into these larger contexts allows us to highlight a dimension of the project that has been relatively neglected: for if even the state was not always treated as *the* focal point at hand, it ran like a common strand over the course of these debates, serving as the context (or terrain) of the possibilities of politics, and the object toward which democratic struggles were to be channeled.

¹⁶¹ See Mahoney, "Strategies of Causal Assessment in Comparative Historical Analysis." For representative discussions of the new institutionalism from the time, see Peter A. Hall and Rosemary C. R. Taylor, "Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms," *Political Studies* 44 (1996): 936-957; and Kathleen Thelen, "Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 369-404.

¹⁶² Ruth Berins Collier, *Paths Toward Democracy: The Working Class and Elites in Western Europe and South America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 8.

In particular, there were three themes from the contemporary neo-Marxist scholarship that also resonated with *Transitions*: the autonomy of politics from immediate determination by the class struggle or social forces at large; the emphasis on the internal fissures and contradictions within the authoritarian state that made them vulnerable to strategic political action; and the transition first to political democracy, and only subsequently to a deeper form of democratization. A central premise of both literatures was that democratic openings were not the results of a country's socioeconomic development, but instead conjunctural outcomes dependent upon the balance of forces in society, the nature of the hegemonic coalition at the center of the regime, and ultimately, on concerted political action. Both sets of literatures also shared a general sensitivity to the idea of transitions as stepwise processes. In this conception, an initial transition to political democracy—even if not immediately followed by one to social or economic democracy—was crucial. Against the arguments for the seizure of the state and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, they argued for a gradual, stage-wise transition to a new form of regime, and a thorough democratization of the state. Lastly, O'Donnell's background in neo-Marxist state theory also allowed him to pose the questions of how we ought to think of democracy not simply as a regime, and instead as a particular arrangement of the relationship between state and society, thus opening the door to the possibility of democratization being understood as an ongoing and indefinite political project rather than a liberal-democratic regime type.

Because *Transitions* came into existence within approximately a five year window of 1979-1984, it overlapped both chronologically and thematically with the Committee for States and Social Structures. The two initiatives shared an obvious affinity in their concern with the “big” questions of social scientific research. Yet they can also be understood as the intellectual

outgrowths of the debates and variants of postwar Marxism, including dependency theory, world-systems analysis, and structural Marxism—intellectual frameworks in which the state featured much more prominently than in the orthodox Marxism of decades past. Within the disciplinary history of political science, both *Transitions* and the Committee were responses to pluralist, structural-functionalist, and orthodox Marxist accounts of the relationships between social and political change. The main organizing theme in both sets of scholarship was the study of the conditions under which the political level—whether in the form of state institutions or individual or group agents—could gain a degree of independence from the societally-determining constraints highlighted in previous frameworks.

But it is equally important to note that how these projects approached the question of the state and the autonomy of politics also differed in an important way. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the Committee’s primary emphasis on the study of the state was as an *analytical* corrective to societally-reductive accounts; in that framework, the state was operationalized as a set of bureaucratic institutions and treated as an objectively existing, structural counterpart to society. However, *Transitions*’ apparent neglect of the state was not due to its relative disinterest in the topic. Instead, it was the result of the different normative outlook and questions that motivated its authors, and particularly O’Donnell. His analysis of bureaucratic-authoritarianism and of the transitions from authoritarian rule was not conducted exclusively from the detached standpoint of a social scientist, but equally importantly from that of a political agent. For example, in the opening of his “Notes for a Theory of the State,” he called that work “a moment in the elaboration of the conceptual tools to better understand not only a type of state but also—and above all—the historical processes traversed by struggles that

mark the implantation, impact, and *collapse* of this state” (emphasis mine).¹⁶³ In other words, the theorization of the bureaucratic-authoritarian state, and the capitalist state more broadly, was part of a normatively informed political project to help instantiate a transition to a more democratic regime.

As a result, when transferred to the research initiative on transitions from authoritarianism, this same standpoint of political agency also turned the “the state” from a structural entity to an internally-fragmented relationship. In the words of Guilhot, by focusing on democratic *agents* among both incumbents and opposition, *Transitions* “located within the state the principle of its own transformation. It was hence possible to analyze political change as a process internal to the ruling elite and relatively unconstrained by the structural patterns of state-society relations.”¹⁶⁴ By making the causes and factors of the transition *internal* to the state, and so making the state an object of political praxis, O’Donnell and Schmitter provided one kind of solution to the questions that, a few years earlier, were at the forefront of Eurocommunist and neo-Marxist inquiries concerning the process of the transition to socialism.

¹⁶³ O’Donnell, “Apuntes Para una Teoria del Estado,” 2 (translation mine).

¹⁶⁴ Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers*, 146-47.

Conclusion: Reevaluating the State and the Discipline Today

In the early 1990s, Theodore Lowi argued that political scientists' return to the state was a valiant effort at broadening the horizon of the discipline away from the short-sighted empiricism that flourished in the 1950s-1960s. Yet he also criticized this same intellectual turn for reifying its subject matter, to the point where the state was now being treated as a "unitary, solitary reality that can be brought into theory as some kind of a measurable force." In contrast, Lowi argued that the state was a concept less conducive to empirical investigation than to normative reflection and political engagement. It was a term of art, "a residual category, applied to the explanation when all known measurable and controllable factors have been exhausted. It is not a phenomenon that can be studied directly."¹ While Lowi was critical of the neo-statist turn for neglecting the discipline's past, he acknowledged that the concept had clear theoretical value as a means of bridging the scientific side of political science with a "higher level of discourse" focusing on the normative aspects of constitutional democracy.

In this dissertation, I have sought to develop and expand on this insight by reconstructing how political science became interested in this elusive concept. I have argued that this intellectual turn clarifies how we understand the establishment of social scientific paradigms, the relationship between theoretical contestation and the formation of research agendas in political science, and the way that discourses about the state shape and affect our own conceptions of political knowledge and agency. During the course of the discipline's history from the late nineteenth century to the present, the state has been a moving target—an object of knowledge that manifests itself in a variety of ways depending on the questions that researchers bring to the

¹ Theodore J. Lowi, "The Return to the State: Critiques" *American Political Science Review* 82 (1988): 891.

table. Conceptualizations of the state are inherently normative and bound up with how political scientists have defined the field in relation to the social world they study—which, in turn, is itself affected by social forces and interactions that escape attempts to grasp them in theory. For this reason, the state continues to occupy one of the central places in the power-knowledge nexus of modern political discourse, and changing conceptions of it provide us with a vantage point to see how the self-identity of political science has itself changed. Analytically, it requires us to ask why the state has persisted as one of the central organizing concepts within the political language of modernity, despite its essentially contested character and complicated relationship to the scientific study of politics. And normatively, it urges us to continue thinking about the relationship between references to the state and contemporary understandings of liberalism and democracy.

In these concluding pages, I will reiterate this argument in light of the contemporary dilemmas of liberal democratic polities, which find themselves facing a situation not unlike that of the tail end of the 1960s, where my narrative began. From our present vantage point, the period spanning from the late 1960s to the late 1980s now appears in retrospect as a transitional stage in the history of modern liberalism, as both its politics and ideology underwent a significant shift toward the contemporary set of practices we now colloquially understand as “neoliberalism.” The present systemic crisis of this model, the onset of which is usually dated to the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 but may be extended further back to the events of September 11, 2001, has deeply affected the liberal democratic states that were at the forefront of this shift. In recent years, the European Union has been shaken by growing concerns over its “democratic deficit,” a fiscal and monetary crisis, and the growing presence of far-right, nationalist parties leading to last year’s Brexit vote in the U.K. In the United States, the election

of Donald Trump in November 2016 has raised legitimate concerns about a creeping domestic authoritarianism premised on the erosion of civil rights and plutocratic government, further exacerbating the undemocratic character of the American political system. Considering these developments, fears of a new authoritarian rollback are high. Some twenty five years after Francis Fukuyama announced that liberal democracy had exhausted its ideological and political competitors, its own future looks increasingly in question.

As we grapple with the question of how to safeguard the historical gains of liberal democracy, but also of how to substantially democratize it and remedy its many flaws, we face the task of reevaluating the relationship between social scientific research, normative theory, and political practices. I believe that greater attentiveness to the disciplinary past of political science, including its blind spots and biases, can help us continue to think about the unresolved tensions between the value neutral stance of contemporary political science and the liberal historical context in which it formed and continues to operate. In turn, by rethinking this relationship we may lay the ground for a renewed commitment to critical social science that is increasingly important in the present.

I. Political Science after the Statist Turn

I have emphasized in Chapter One that the state has always been a point of tension within American political science. Between approximately 1880 and 1960, the state went from being the cornerstone concept on which a science of politics could rest to largely being dismissed as an obfuscating notion that should be confined to the “pre-scientific” history of the discipline. This “declination of the state” (per John Gunnell) occurred in two major waves—with the pluralist rejection of the state in the 1920s, followed by the behavioral revolution of the 1950s. As a result of this change, the mainstream discipline was represented as a value-free, scientific enterprise

that matched the relatively “stateless” American polity, at a time when the United States’ main ideological and geopolitical rival was presented as a totalitarian regime where the state had subdued and swallowed up civil society. The discursive absence of the state from the lexicon of disciplinary political science as the role and capacities of the U.S. national state were becoming more powerful than ever speaks to the ideological character of Cold War liberalism and the politicized relationship of professional social science to the American state.

In Chapter Two, I argued that a newfound interest in Marxist political theory acted as a major conduit for the state to become an object of analysis in political science during the 1970s. There, I traced the origin of this turn within postbehavioral political science—beginning with early critiques of pluralism and culminating in neo-Marxist critiques of both pluralism and elite theory. Neo-Marxist frameworks and concepts provided a theoretical alternative to the prevalent paradigms of structural-functionalism and behavioralism, and their correlates in modernization theory and liberal pluralism, acting as the means by which critical scholars could reframe the relationship of political science to American liberal democracy. The exclusion of Marxism from the discipline in prior decades allowed it to act as an external standpoint from which a critique of the disciplinary mainstream could be undertaken. In effect, the initial reception of Marxist scholarship on the state created a temporary disjuncture between existing political science understood *as a science of the state*, and the policies that were at the time being created by state institutions. This alternative discourse of the state provided a new theoretical framework through which to contest existing social scientific assumptions.

In Chapters Three and Four, I discussed two examples of research initiatives of the 1980s through which Marxist debates about the state intersected with and were adopted, in modified form, into the disciplinary matrix of professional political science, especially by way of

institutionalized and systematic intellectual practices (conferences, publications, research committees) of knowledge creation *about* the state. I selected as my examples the Committee on States and Social Structures and *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* precisely because they were two prominent and contemporaneous disciplinary initiatives through which the state and its related problems reappeared within the discipline, albeit in different forms. Both the Committee and *Transitions* appeared at the tail end of the 1970s, first anticipated by the neo-Marxist revival of the preceding decade. Thus, they came to borrow and develop certain insights from these Marxist attempts to theorize the role of the political—the state—within the capitalist mode of production. These initiatives challenged the dominant research agendas within the discipline, not least of all by concentrating on what they identified as the unique role played by political (rather than social) forces to explain contemporary phenomena that were insufficiently being explained by “societally-reductive” accounts.

In Chapter Three, I discussed how the Committee used the questions raised by neo-Marxism as a starting point for its own research agenda to “bring the state back in.” The Committee took from the Marxist debates about the capitalist state their emphasis on the underlying biases of pluralism and its hidden dimension of power, and the importance of understanding the dynamics between capitalist development and political forms in a historical and structural framework. However, the Committee “resolved” the internal differences of neo-Marxist theory, such as the controversy over structuralist and instrumentalist approaches captured in the Miliband-Poulantzas debate, by subjecting them to a common critique of their societal reductionism. In their place, it advocated a neo-Weberian defense of the state as a set of administrative institutions manned by political actors with interests distinct from those of the ruling classes. In that regard, the Committee took more from neo-Marxism its basic questions

and starting points rather than its conceptual framework (even overlapping concepts such as state autonomy carried very different theoretical meanings). However, despite the selective nature of this appropriation, neo-Marxism clearly provided the initial opening through which the Committee then stepped in to advocate its own goal of shifting the discipline away from the purported societally-reductive accounts that plagued pluralists and Marxists alike.

In Chapter Four, I focused on *Transitions* as another example of the neo-Marxist influence on the revival of interest in the state. Although explicit discussions of the state are largely absent from that project, by situating that research initiative within the broader context of Guillermo O'Donnell's intellectual trajectory, as well as alongside the concurrent neo-Marxist debates about the state in the transition to socialism, I suggested that the subject matter covered in *Transitions* can be seen as a modified continuation of these same themes. While *Transitions* is considered a foundational text for later studies of comparative democratization, I have argued that the predominant agent-oriented interpretation of this project neglects how neo-Marxist theories of the state and of transitions from dictatorship to liberal democracy and socialism served as the background context against which *Transitions* defined its research agenda. Moreover, I highlighted the important continuities between *Transitions* and O'Donnell's prior and subsequent contributions to theories of bureaucratic authoritarianism and polyarchic democracy. Taking into account O'Donnell's broader preoccupation with the state, I have argued that *Transitions* did not so much neglect the state but rather approached it in a different modality than the Committee, with a greater degree of attention to state's role as the terrain on which transitions are initiated and carried out, in a manner similar to neo-Marxist treatments of the state.

Therefore, both projects shared an influence and affinity with neo-Marxist ideas, yet also used them as a foil through which to advance approaches that self-consciously emphasized

political, rather than societal, factors. Both initiatives involved the creation of a new narrative about the unfolding of the discipline up till then that juxtaposed a “societally-reductive” paradigm to their own emphasis on political forces. By treating the state as potentially autonomous from society, these research initiatives concentrated on the political dimension of social structures; yet in doing so, they also downplayed a major aspect of neo-Marxist state theory: its emphasis on the class structure of capitalist society, even if always mediated by politics and ideology. In other words, while they were inspired by neo-Marxism in their overarching questions and skepticism of the predominant viewpoints within the discipline, they saw themselves as providing essentially *politician* correctives to neo-Marxist discussions of the relationship between political and social phenomena.

This selective integration of Marxist theory into the discipline in the 1970s and 1980s had a dual effect on subsequent political science. On one hand, it is important not to overstate the case by claiming that the reception of Marxism introduced a wholesale paradigm shift in the discipline. The field never saw the internal revolution that the early advocates of the Caucus for a New Political Science had hoped for, and to that extent, large segments of the discipline continued to implicitly assume liberalism, value neutrality, and methodological individualism as foundational to the study of politics. However, many of the leading practitioners, professional organizations, and journals of the field did undergo a period of critical self examination about the blind spots that political science had inherited by developing in the American context. Historically, these included its progressive view about the accumulation of knowledge, its emphasis on consensus over conflict in society, its uneasiness with notions of class struggle, and its stubborn empiricism when it came to foundational yet contested concepts such as “power” or

“the state.” All of these tendencies, which arguably reached their apogee in the behavioral revolution, were challenged in the period between the late 1960s and the 1980s.

The integration of Marxism can be seen as the first instance of the theoretical opening that the discipline underwent after the attempted homogeneity of the behavioral era. During the 1960s-1970s, the Marxist critique of liberalism was the initial salvo in what has since been a process of fits and starts by which the discipline has grappled with the implications of its own foundations. Up until the present, political science has come to absorb and integrate a variety of competing perspectives and traditions, leading to a relative pluralization of the field in terms of its theories, approaches, and methods. To be sure, today there are strong and influential advocates in some corners for methodological (and therefore epistemic) uniformity; yet few today would explicitly advocate reorienting the field onto a single theoretical paradigm.² Political science in the twenty-first century remains a fairly polyphonic discipline—even if this pluralism has emerged as the result of a post-*Perestroika* détente rather than a real reconciliation.

This methodological pluralism has also facilitated ongoing attention to the state. Today, treatments of the state in political science are diverse and, in terms of their epistemic assumptions, can be found on a broad spectrum ranging from neo-positivism to interpretivism. Consider some examples. On the neo-positivist side, institutionalist approaches to the state, both from within the historical and rational choice traditions, have converged on an agreement to disaggregate the state (to varying extents) in order to study its component parts.³ In American Political Development, scholars have come to approach the American state as “characterized by

² See the recent controversy over the Data Access and Research Transparency (DA-RT) initiative, including Jeffrey C. Isaac, “For a More Public Political Science,” *Perspectives on Politics* 13 (2015): 269-283; and the symposium on DA-RT in the *Comparative Politics Newsletter* 26 (2016): 10-64.

³ Ira Katznelson and Barry R. Weingast, “Intersections Between Historical and Rational Choice Institutionalism,” in *Preferences and Situations: Points of Intersection Between Historical and Rational Choice Institutionalism*, eds. Ira Katznelson and Barry R. Weingast (New York: Russell Sage, 2007), 1-24.

horizontal (rather than vertical) integration, a blurring of the nominal distinction between private and public power, a dynamic parceling of sovereignty, and an energized rather than constraining application of the rule of law.”⁴ In comparative democratization studies, state institutions figure as important variables that can affect the outcomes of democratization.⁵ Some recent literature on social movements represents a theoretical revival of pluralism that critiques state-centric approaches, emphasizing the state’s porous boundaries and characterizing it as a set of informal and formal interactions that are brought together into a collective identity via rhetoric and norms.⁶ Toward the more interpretive side, efforts from the “state-in-society” approach have stressed the contradictory character of the state as embedded in a historical and cultural context where it is both the *image* of a coherent and unified organization, and the actual *practices* of groupings and fragments that, together, make up this unity.⁷ Similarly, another strand of research characterized by discourse theoretical and neo-Foucauldian approaches to the state have focused on the *appearance* of the state as a body standing above and distinct from society, as what Timothy Mitchell influentially called “the state effect.”⁸

This sheer diversity of approaches in the present indicates a recognition that the state is a multidimensional concept whose effects and consequences touch upon a variety of fundamental

⁴ See William J. Novak, “The Myth of the ‘Weak’ American State,” *American Historical Review* 113 (2008): 765.

⁵ See for example Munck, “The Regime Question: Theory Building in Democracy Studies,” and “Democratic Theory after *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*,” Daniel Ziblatt, *Structuring the State: The Formation of Italy and Germany and the Puzzle of Federalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁶ James M. Jasper, “Introduction” to *Breaking Down the State: Protestors Engaged*, eds. Jan Willem Duyvendak and James M. Jasper, eds. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 11.

⁷ Novak, “Conclusion: The Concept of the State in American History,” 342; Migdal, *State in Society*, 22-23; and Adam White, ed. *The Everyday Life of the State: A State-in-Society Approach* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013).

⁸ George Steinmetz, ed. *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Peter Bratsis, *Everyday Life and the State* (London: Routledge, 2007); James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Michael Marinetto, *Social Theory, the State, and Modern Society* (New York: Open University Press, 2007), 31-51, 96-118.

political questions, including sovereignty, borders, identity, citizenship, nationalism, democracy, representation, and legitimacy.⁹ In addition, it suggests that despite past attempts to reject, replace, or disaggregate it, the ability to invoke the state remains powerfully appealing to many scholars, as a way of gesturing toward politics occurring at a higher level of unity and systemic interrelation. In Lowi's words, postbehavioral political scientists initially found themselves "having to reintroduce 'the state'...because there is now a reality that no other concept can capture. We can't operationalize it, nor can we break it up into a set of particular variables. But whatever it is, its existence in America has made it impossible for political science to remain what it had been."¹⁰ And as Margaret Levi, despite being a proponent of disaggregation, acknowledged, "The State' captures the combination of centralized, far-reaching coercion with the complex of staff, governmental institutions, and nongovernmental actors and agencies in a way that nothing else seems to."¹¹

To that extent, the persistent interest in the state among a diverse body of political science scholarship, as well as the plurality of theoretical and methodological approaches deployed to study this phenomenon, may lead one to think that its place as a focal point of political science research was definitively secured by the state-centric research agendas of recent decades, and continues unimpeded today. However, while the need to study the state is widely accepted, the incorporation of Marxism into the fold of the political science discipline also forfeited some of the critical tools that literature had to offer for understanding this concept in relation to the practice of political science. Whereas in the late 1960s Marxism had gained academic

⁹ Some examples of this approach include Abrams, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State;" Pierre Bourdieu, *On the State* (Polity, 2015); Mitchell, "The Limits of the State;" and most recently, Kimberly J. Morgan and Ann Shola Orloff (eds.) *The Many Hands of the State: Theorizing Political Authority and Social Control* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁰ Theodore Lowi, "Foreword" to Seideman, *Disenchanted Realists*, First Edition, xvii.

¹¹ Levi, "The State of the Study of the State," 33.

respectability as a legitimate critique of mainstream social science, the following decade saw a dual crisis of Marxist theory and politics in the West, as the decline of working class power and the structural transformations of the welfare state encouraged scholarly attention to turn to other frameworks of analysis. Within political science, by the mid-1980s Marxism was displaced from its status as an alternative social scientific paradigm to being one among others in a discipline that, at any rate, was becoming less and less interested in disputes over paradigms. Therefore, the integration of what was intended as a *critique* of political science into the parameters of the discipline also came with the price of dulling its more radical implications.

In particular, two key elements of the neo-Marxist treatment of the state were forgotten over the course of this process of disciplinary integration: its connection to a systematic critique of capitalism, and its focus on the state as an object of concerted political practice. In the following section, I will elaborate on these two aspects, arguing that they have taken on a renewed importance in the present. And in the final, and concluding section, I will restate the main contributions of my findings to existing debates, future research trajectories, and contemporary political dilemmas.

II. Bringing *What State Back In?*

It was not a coincidence that a renewed interest in the state took hold among American social scientists in the period between the 1960s and the 1980s. Situating this theoretical revival in a historical context, we can see that it overlapped with the social, economic, and legitimacy crises experienced by liberal-democratic societies in the advanced industrialized world. This challenge to the postwar liberal consensus was by no means as dramatic and violent of a rupture as the one of the 1930s. Nevertheless, it prompted a reevaluation of predominant modes of social scientific analysis. Pluralist, behavioral, and structural-functionalist approaches had largely

assumed some degree of systemic stability as characteristic of the “end of ideology” in the postwar world. Their inability to account for the series of shocks to the liberal-democratic system from the late 1960s onward opened the door to an influx of radical scholarship that had challenged the basic premises and purpose of the discipline. I have argued that the reintroduction of the state concept in this context provided a unique vantage point from which to advance a normative critique of then-existing American political science and its inability to explain the erosion of New Deal liberalism in the 1960s and 1970s.

While neo-Marxist scholarship had a relatively brief lifespan, its normative distance from the basic problematic of liberal political science and the unique conceptual language that it supplied for talking about the state and political power allowed it to posit an alternative research agenda for the discipline. Although we saw in Chapter Two that a unified “Marxist Theory of the State” showed itself to be a theoretical impossibility, it is important to emphasize that the different schools of thought that fell into this literature were linked by two components that undergirded the common effort to articulate a theory of the capitalist state.

First, neo-Marxist accounts of the state were attempts to theorize the mutual determination between political, economic, and ideological institutions in advanced capitalist societies; and to understand the manner in which these spheres of activity interacted to provide the elements of legitimacy and stability necessary for the dynamic reproduction of capitalism as a social system (as well as the potential for its transformation). In this context, understanding the origins, character, and functions of the capitalist state meant broadening and modifying the initial insights of classical Marxism and Leninism in order to account for the realities of postwar capitalism. Despite their theoretical differences, competing neo-Marxist theories of the state all acknowledged that the social scientific *critique* of capitalism remained at the forefront of their

collective endeavor. The polemics between the so-called instrumentalist, structuralist, and class struggle theories of the capitalist state, among others, and their methodological preoccupations, can be explained in terms of the need to assert the validity of a Marxist social science as against the ossified interpretations of Marxism used as Communist party ideology. Alongside the discussions of Eurocommunism, Marxist theories of the state were attempts to break out of the restraining confines of Bolshevism and Leninism, and corresponding notions of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which rang hollow by the early 1970s. Even attempts to reassert the theoretical importance of Leninism, such as Balibar's and Colletti's, had to ground their arguments in terms of an appeal to Marxism as a science in contrast to Stalinist "pragmatism." Rather than simply rejecting the liberal democratic state form as an ideological veneer for capitalist class rule, Miliband, Poulantzas, Therborn, Offe, and others grappled with the opportunities and limitations of radical politics within the structures of postwar social democracy (along with its net positives of constitutional government, parliamentary representation, and liberal rights), and the prospect of further democratizing these capitalist states in a transition to socialism. In their critique of both liberal capitalism and Soviet communism, they raised the possibility of a convergence between these types of states, thus opening a dialogue with leftist dissidents in the Communist bloc—for example such as the one taking place at the 1977 *Il Manifesto*-sponsored conference, "Power and Opposition in Post-revolutionary Societies."

Second, while I have argued that all theorizing of the state remains a political act, this has been the case to the greatest and most transparent degree within the Marxist tradition. As Philip Abrams perceptively noted at the time, Marxism needed the state both as an "abstract-formal object" to explain the functioning of class societies as well as a "real-concrete object" against

which the political struggle could be directed.¹² But whereas Abrams saw this as a tension that hindered the possibility of state theory, it also provides a key insight about the *practical* import of theorizing the state. As I touched upon in Chapter Four in the overview of Eurocommunist debates concerning the transition to socialism, the accurate description of the nature and functions of the capitalist state was inseparable from certain tactical questions about how the left could organize new forms of counterhegemony. In that regard, questions of what practical and organizational stance these movements could adopt vis-à-vis state institutions were intimately bound up with the analytical task of understanding the relationship between states and social formations, and their role within the capitalist mode of production.¹³ As the Miliband-Poulantzas debate and the split between Leninists and Eurocommunists indicated, different understandings of the state implied differences in strategy and political practices in relation to organized political power. Rather than rejecting parliamentary politics in favor of an anticipated confrontation with a state that was the instrument of the ruling class, neo-Marxist accounts asked how a democratic transition to socialism could be initiated from the intersection between left social movements and the permeable structures of the capitalist state. Being examples of normatively-motivated political and social theory, they used the analysis of the state as a starting point for identifying a democratic Marxist alternative to Leninism. In that manner, these discussions operated in a space of perpetually unresolved tension between the state as an object of knowledge and as a structure of power—and thus in the space between political theory and political practice.

However, by the late 1980s, both of these elements had been either downplayed or abandoned in the process of the appropriation of Marxist political thought and the new focus on the state in the American social sciences. In retrospect, Katznelson has noted that the emergence

¹² Abrams, “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State.”

¹³ For an example from that time, see Leo Panitch, “The State and the Future of Socialism,” *Capital & Class* 11 (1980): 121-137.

of the historical institutionalist framework in the 1980s-90s from the intersection of then-existing comparative politics scholarship, Western Marxism, and the “realism” of Weber, Hintze, and Durkheim was more temporally and topically confined than what had preceded it. As he wrote, while it was “more diffuse thematically and analytically, it also attended less to extraordinary moments of transformation and more to normal politics.” Whereas Marxism strove to provide a theoretical account of society in which structure, agency and history were intertwined, its scholarly and political crisis led to a decline of interest in this framework, and an attempt to replace it with a “more static and cross-sectional organizational materialism.”¹⁴

In the process of this appropriation and critique, the normative and practical component of Marxist social theory, and its treatment of the state at the juncture between theory and practice, was excluded from the neo-statist revival. In advancing its own state-centric model and its corresponding history of the discipline’s past, the Committee on States and Social Structures had portrayed neo-Marxism as a societally-reductive approach, foreclosing the questions that body of scholarship was raising about the relationship of organized political power to political practice. The Committee thus channeled the revival of interest in Marxism and the state into a relatively noncontroversial discourse in which the latter became an operationalizable variable—a crucial one, to be sure—but which mostly bracketed out the question of how the knowledge practices of political science were themselves enmeshed within the theoretical horizon of the state.¹⁵ In addition, as a sign of the declining status of Marxist social and political theory by the 1980s, neo-

¹⁴ Katznelson, “Strong Theory, Complex History: Structure and Configuration in Comparative Politics Revisited,” 100.

¹⁵ Theda Skocpol and Dietrich Rueschemeyer’s edited volume *States, Social Knowledge, and the Origins of Modern Social Policies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), which was developed from one of the Committee’s central areas of focus in the previous decade, did concentrate on the reciprocal relationship between academic research and social policy, especially with regard to the welfare state. However, this volume was not principally concerned with the relationship between the discourse of the state and state policies, choosing to focus primarily on the latter .

statism rejected the articulation of state power and class power that was the unique contribution of neo-Marxism, in favor of a fairly one sided focus on how political institutions within advanced capitalist societies could be used to secure social democratic policies in a non-revolutionary manner.¹⁶ In asserting the state's potential autonomy from social processes rather than its role in the reproduction of capitalist social relations, this model hinged on the expectation that bureaucratic institutions and state managers could moderate and channel capitalist social and economic relations, precisely at a time when those relations were themselves being radically transformed into the contemporary neoliberal consensus.

In contrast to the Committee, I have argued that *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* was an example of knowledge-creation about the state for a normative purpose, and that especially in its final volume it held a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between social structures, political agency, and the production of knowledge than it has traditionally been credited with. Yet that project relied on an approach that, while situating transitions on the terrain of the state, did not discuss them in those terms. For practical purposes, the political knowledge that it sought to articulate was consciously framed in the language of elite agency rather than state structures and class politics. Thus, while the state implicitly remained the focus of the project, it was no longer the target of concerted political action, but the background against which elite negotiations and regime change occurred. This distinction allowed the contributors of *Transitions* to advocate for a relatively more circumscribed process of regime change rather than the more radical changes to the state advocated by neo-Marxists, leaving the potential transition to socialism to the distant future.

Therefore, in both of these research initiatives within post-behavioral political science, the state was present but sanitized of the critical connotations initially associated with it in the

¹⁶ Katznelson, "The State to the Rescue?" 733.

neo-Marxist literature. As I have argued, one of the contributions of Marxist scholarship was to expose and problematize this symbiotic relationship between the academic social scientific establishment and the state—since the very proximity of the social scientific establishment to the state during the immediate postwar years also prevented that scholarship from attaining a certain necessary critical distance. The theoretical effort to “bring the state back in” came after the policy links between political science and the actual American state had grown increasingly strained due to the discrediting of this academic-state nexus after the Vietnam War.¹⁷ However, in the cases of the Committee on States and Social Structures and *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, the underlying normative message was the condoning, if not explicit promotion, of a general realignment between political science research and the goals of liberal democracy. In the case of the Committee, the analytic emphasis on the state was motivated by a hope that an autonomous state could successfully manage the structural contradictions of the new capitalism in the interests of a social-liberal democracy. In the case of *Transitions*, the project’s focus on the circumstances most conducive to a transition spoke to the wish to see liberal-democratic polyarchies emerge and take root in regions where the history of liberalism has been tumultuous.

Both initiatives benefited from the nexus between academic scholarship and privately funded research, as indicated by their links to the Rockefeller Foundation and the Woodrow Wilson Center.¹⁸ Much like the “political science enlightenment” scholarship of the late 1940s described by Katznelson, they sought to provide a knowledge about the state in relation to liberal democratic governance, as the latter faced a new set of challenges in the wake of the 1970s. Marxism had provided the necessary conceptual and theoretical tools for grasping that moment. Yet after its partial incorporation, once the critical connotations it attached to the state had faded,

¹⁷ Oren, *Our Enemies and US*, 15.

¹⁸ See especially Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers*.

these research agendas gradually drifted back to a promotion of liberal democracy through the state, thereby reaffirming the underlying linkages between the two within the history of political science.

III. Liberalism, Capitalism, and the State Today

The return to the state within professional political science was motivated by a political and normative component that has largely been overlooked in histories of the discipline. In this concluding section, I will point to the ongoing relevance of these historical and theoretical insights for the present, as the relationship between liberal democracy and capitalism in the twenty-first century once again appears increasingly fraught, raising new concerns about crises of democratic legitimacy, the rise of populism, and the new authoritarianism in Europe, Latin America, and now even the United States.¹⁹

This crisis of liberal democracy has made explicit the tension between the ostensibly value-neutral pursuits of political science research and the underlying normative commitment to a defense of liberal institutions that has characterized the discipline since its foundation. Judging by the proliferation of political scientists writing about the crisis of liberalism in popular outlets since last year, the discipline as a whole is experiencing a newfound prominence in the public sphere. Yet paradoxically it remains plagued by a sense of relative powerlessness when it comes to convincing average citizens of its public relevance, and an internal disenchantment with its inability to inform democratic discourse and to bolster liberal institutions in the face of authoritarian and populist challenges. I do not wish to suggest that a greater sense of historical

¹⁹ For example, see Nancy Fraser, “Legitimation Crisis? On the Political Contradictions of Financialized Capitalism” *Critical Historical Studies* 2 (2015): 157-189; Streeck, *Buying Time*; Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Robert Mickey, Steven Levitsky, and Lucan Ahmad Way, “Is America Still Safe for Democracy?” *Foreign Affairs*. 16 June 2017. Web (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/United-States/2017-04-17/america-still-safe-democracy>).

awareness nor a simple return to old discussions are alone capable of remedying these problems. However, I believe that some understanding of the field's recent past can clarify the longstanding tension between value-neutral research and normative theorization that it continues to grapple with today.

One of the most notable changes since the financial crisis of 2007-2008 has been the resurgence of both academic and popular interest in the analysis of capitalism, class politics, and inequality—particularly in the developed world. Today critiques of capitalism and positive public opinion of socialism (loosely defined) have entered into mainstream political conversations to an extent not seen since the 1970s, as attested to by the recent popularity of books like Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, as well as Marx's *Capital* itself.

One example is a growing discussion concerning the effects of economic inequality on democratic accountability and elite influence. In fact, a renewed interest in the tensions between capitalism and representative democracy have prompted scholars of American politics to revisit and draw upon the old critiques of pluralism developed by figures like Schattschneider, Lowi, Lindblom, Mills, and Domhoff.²⁰ For Jeffrey Winters and Benjamin Page, the American political system could be characterized as an oligarchy in which wealth decisively affects political influence; while for Page and Martin Gilens, that same system today more closely anticipates “biased pluralism” or “economic-elite domination” than either majoritarian pluralism or representative democracy. Meanwhile, Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson have argued for the return to a study of politics through a “policy-focused perspective,” understood as competition over the shaping of policy and governance rather than over votes, thereby once again emphasizing the

²⁰ See also the special issue of *Politics & Society* 38, no. 2 (2010) dedicated to the discussion of economic inequality in the United States.

study of organized interests interacting with political institutions.²¹ Together with the APSA Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy (first established in 2001), contributions like these have identified how current political institutions give far greater opportunities for influence to the wealthy; how accumulated wealth has far reaching and self-reinforcing consequences for political participation; and how growing inequality diminishes participation among the worst off. Such findings have been crucial for highlighting how socio-economic inequality erodes political democracy, with the United States not being exceptional in that regard.

Yet this revival of interest in inequality and elite influence has also in part been an exercise in “analytic amnesia.” As Frances Fox Piven, Fred Block, and Brian Waddell have all pointed out in recent years, this research trajectory has largely neglected past studies that were *responses to* these critiques of pluralism at the tail end of the 1960s.²² The declining fate of Marxism between the late 1980s and the early 2000s had effectively written out of political science’s history the theoretical insights of that scholarship when it came to the analysis of class power and state power. It is true that much has happened since then that has problematized the neo-Marxist treatments of the state and capitalist social relations. However, to imply that even older insights by Schattschneider and Lowi anticipated the tensions between pluralist democracy and business power in the second decade of the twenty-first century while subsequent Marxist critiques that engaged that same scholarship *did not* say more about the disciplinary politics of the field and its historical self-perception than it does about theoretical consistency and analytical accuracy. A potential return to notions of biased pluralism and economic elite domination would

²¹ See Jeffrey A. Winters and Benjamin I. Page, “Oligarchy in the United States?” *Perspectives on Politics* 7 (2009): 731-751; Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens” *Perspectives on Politics* 12 (2014): 564-581; and Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, “After the ‘Master Theory’: Downs, Schattschneider, and the Rebirth of Policy-Focused Analysis” *Perspectives on Politics* 12 (2014): 643-662.

²² See Block and Piven, “Déjà Vu, All Over Again;” and Waddell, “When the Past is Not Prologue.”

be incomplete without a more serious consideration of Marxist interpretations of the relationship between class politics and state power—including of the structural role played by state institutions in the growing consolidation of wealth among certain classes, in the *systemic* (rather than contingent) translation of that wealth into political influence, and in the relationship between political participation and the changing class and social composition of American society.

On the obverse side, since approximately 2014 we have seen a surge of interest in the phenomenon of populism, driven by events such as the fiscal crisis of the Greek state; the growing prominence of the far right in countries such as Hungary, Poland, and France; the Brexit vote; and now the election of Trump on an “anti-establishment,” nativist Republican political platform. Analyses of these events have varied. Critics of populism such as Jan-Werner Müller and Cas Mudde have treated populism as a phenomenon that transcends the traditional left-right political divide, seeing society as divided into two antagonistic camps, and thereby posing a distinct threat to pluralistic, liberal democratic institutions.²³ Yet others have argued that populism is actually a symptom not of the excess of democracy, but of the disappearance of the *demos* after the “neoliberal” restructuring of the state and society. Thus, building upon her work with Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe has called the populist upsurge an “expression of legitimate democratic aspirations,” if often misguided toward an exclusionary, rather than inclusive, conception of the people.²⁴ From a neo-Foucauldian standpoint, Wendy Brown has recently characterized neoliberalism as an “order of normative reason” that, when transformed into a form of governance, spreads an economistic rationality to previously non-economic domains of

²³ See for example Müller, *What is Populism?*; Cas Mudde, “The problem with populism,” *Guardian*, 17 February 2015. Web (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/17/problem-populism-syriza-podemos-dark-side-europe>).

²⁴ Chantal Mouffe, “The populist moment,” *OpenDemocracy*, 21 November 2016. Web (<https://www.opendemocracy.net/democraciaabierta/chantal-mouffe/populist-moment>).

activity.²⁵ However, populist attempts to formulate a new unity may be seen as signs that the neoliberal project is still incomplete and internally contradictory to a greater degree than Brown has allowed.²⁶

Here too a reconsideration of Marxist insights, especially those concerning the capitalist state, can prove informative. First, both Laclau and Foucault were immersed in these same neo-Marxist debates during the mid to late 1970s, and their theoretical contributions were formulated largely in conversation and response to the growing influence of Gramsci, Althusser, and Poulantzas over the course of that decade.²⁷ Therefore, from a genealogical standpoint, a reevaluation of Marxist accounts of the state will contribute to a fuller picture in the analysis of both neoliberalism and populism among contemporary political theorists as they have been developed from out of self-consciously “post-Marxist” accounts. More importantly, these theories can serve as correctives to understandings of political power that treat the state as entirely a discursive construct, per Laclau and Mouffe, and against those that conceive of the state as a fictitious juridical unity over and above the micro-power relations that constitute society, per Foucault. Instead, they turn our attention back to the state as a locus (although not the origin) of power, whose structures shape and mediate social processes; act as the means by which social power is formed, consolidated, and exercised; and also serve as the object of political practice toward which contemporary political movements can orient themselves.

²⁵ Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 30-31.

²⁶ Cihan Tugal, “Neoliberal Populism as a Contradictory Articulation,” *European Journal of Sociology* 57 (2017): 466-470.

²⁷ See Laclau, “The Specificity of the Political,” and “Teorias Marxistas del Estado,” and Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003), and *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-1978* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

Furthermore, rather than weakening its the fiscal and administrative capacities, contemporary capitalism has further asserted the state's its integral nature as a component of its development. Despite their varying institutional means, states remain deeply invested in the maintenance and reproduction of their national economies through the establishment and protection of private property rights, the regulation of competition, and the containment of economic crises; and in return, states are highly dependent on successful capital accumulation for tax revenue, and thus for their popular legitimacy.²⁸ One promising research agenda that has emerged in recent years has drawn on Marxian frameworks to examine the transnationalization of the capitalist state and the consolidation of what Poulantzas had in the late 1970s already diagnosed as the emerging "authoritarian statism" as this new form of politics.²⁹ A continuation and expansion of this work to include the relationship between the institutional production of discourses *about* the state (in the vein of the one presented here) and these new forms of governmentality could contribute to this scholarship, as well as potentially bridge the gap between neo-Foucauldian and Marxist forms of analysis.

By way of the historical reconstruction of the reception and influence of Marxist political theory into the discipline, I have attempted to show that this research agenda provided a number of insights that left their imprint on American political science at the time, and which continue to resonate within contemporary discussions. In terms of neoliberalism and populism, understood as the pathologies of the marriage between liberal democracy and capitalism, a return to critical

²⁸ Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire* (London: Verso, 2012), 3.

²⁹ See for example Alex Demirovic, "Materialist State Theory and the Transnationalization of the Capitalist State," *Antipode* 43 (2011): 38-59; Thomas Biebricher and Frieder Vogelmann, "Governmentality and State Theory: Reinventing the Reinvented Wheel?" *Theory & Event* 15 (2012); Shelley L. Hurt and Ronnie D. Lipschutz, eds. *Hybrid Rule and State Formation: Public-Private Power in the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2016); and Bob Jessop, *The State: Past, Present, Future* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015).

theorizations of the state can therefore supplement contemporary discussions, providing a standpoint from which we can work to develop more democratic alternatives.

Here, I would like to conclude with a final point. While this project has been an exercise in disciplinary history and historical political theory, it has been motivated throughout by a practical and normative goal. If political science and political theory scholarship are to be at all concerned with the defense and advancement of a more democratic polity and society in the coming years, I believe that it is urgent for us not to lose sight of the relationship between political power, agency, and knowledge—a relationship for which the history of usages of “the state” is an important example. By reconstructing a part of this history, I have put forward a view of the state not merely as an autonomous actor nor as a metaphysical construct, but rather as a range of social structures and practices that are perpetually being theorized, contested, and modified. My goal in this work has been to explain one aspect of this process, in the hope that it can urge us to grapple with the structures of political power that it represents. Theoretical explanations without political action are hardly sufficient; but perhaps this work can, in its own small way, contribute to the ongoing struggle for a more just and equal society.

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Watkins, Frederick Mundell. *The State as a Concept of Political Science*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1934.

White, Adam, ed. *The Everyday Life of the State: A State-in-Society Approach*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013.

Winters, Jeffrey A. and Benjamin I. Page. "Oligarchy in the United States?" *Perspectives on Politics* 7 (2009): 731-751.

Wolfe, Alan. *The Limits of Legitimacy: Political Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism*. New York: Free Press, 1977.

Wolfe, Alan. "New Directions in the Marxist Theory of Politics." *Politics & Society* 4 (1974): 149-150.

Woolsey, Theodore Dwight. *Communism and Socialism in their History and Theory*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880.

Woolsey, Theodore Dwight. *Political Science, or the State Theoretically and Practically Considered*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889 [1877].

Ziblatt, Daniel. *Structuring the State: The Formation of Italy and Germany and the Puzzle of Federalism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Curriculum Vitae

Rafael Khachaturian

EDUCATION

Indiana University, Bloomington, IN
Ph.D., Political Science, Completed September 2017

The New School, New York, NY
M.A., Politics, 2009, With Honors

The New School, New York, NY
B.A., Liberal Arts, 2008, With Honors

PUBLICATIONS

Peer Reviewed

“Statist Political Science and American Marxism: A Historical Encounter,” *Contemporary Political Theory* (Online First, Nov. 2016; forthcoming in print)

“Uncertain Knowledge and Democratic Transitions: Revisiting O'Donnell and Schmitter's Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies,” *Polity* 47 (2015): 114-139

Review Essays

“Symbols of Failure? Radical Democracy Between Past and Future” (review of Warren Breckman, *Adventures of the Symbolic: Post-Marxism and Radical Democracy*), *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society and Culture* (2014)

“Liberal Ideology and the Modern World System” (review of Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System IV: Centrist Liberalism Triumphant*), *Historical Materialism* 21 (2013): 273-288

Book Reviews

Alejandro Portes, *Economic Sociology: A Systematic Inquiry* (*Science and Society* 77 [2013]: 275-278)

George Hartley, *The Abyss of Representation: Marxism and the Postmodern Sublime* (*Science and Society* 73 [2009]: 576-578)

DISSERTATION

Discipline, Knowledge, and Critique: Marxist Theory and the Revival of the State in American Political Science, 1968-1989

Committee: Jeffrey C. Isaac (Chair), William E. Scheuerman, Russell L. Hanson, William Rasch (Germanic Studies)

This project is a study of the theorization and usages of the concept of 'the state' within American political science, concentrating on its revival in the 1960s-1980s. I reconstruct this intellectual turn by focusing on how contemporary neo-Marxist debates about the capitalist state were received and incorporated into the American context, providing a standpoint from which to critique the normative assumptions and professional practices within the field. I trace this influence by focusing on two key research initiatives: the "Committee on States and Social Structures," and "Transitions from Authoritarian Rule." Through this critical genealogy of the production of political knowledge, I suggest that discourses of the state act as key vantage points for understanding the intersection of disciplinary identity, political power, and democratic practices.

PRESENTATIONS

Panel Organizer: "Confronting the State: Democratic Theory and Political Practice in Uncertain Times" Northeastern Political Science Association, Philadelphia, PA (2017)

"Demystifying the Deep State" Northeastern Political Science Association, Philadelphia, PA (2017)

"Between Marx and Weber: The Return to the State in American Political Science" Southern Political Science Association, New Orleans, LA (2017)

"Between Marx and Weber: The Return to the State in American Political Science" Association for Political Theory, Columbus, OH (2016)

"The Political Theory and Practice of SYRIZA" Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL (2016)

"The Political Theory and Practice of SYRIZA" Western Political Science Association, San Diego, CA (2016)

"Miliband, Poulantzas, and the Problem of the Capitalist State" Political Theory Colloquium, Indiana University (2016)

"The Political against the State: Laclau, Poulantzas and Radical Democracy" Philosophy and Social Science Colloquium, Prague, Czech Republic (2015)

“Marxism and the Origins of American Political Science: A Silent Debate about the State” Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL (2015)

“Marxism and the Origins of American Political Science: A Silent Debate about the State” Northwestern University Graduate Conference in Political Theory, Evanston, IL (2014)

“The Materiality of the State: Revisiting State Autonomy and the Base-Superstructure Problem” Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL (2014)

“Back to the Structure: Mobilization and Institution Formation in Developing Societies” Co-authored with Vasbjit Banerjee. Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL (2012)

“Reconsidering the Power Debate” Boston College Graduate Philosophy Conference, Boston, MA (2010)

“Federalism and Popular Sovereignty in the Origins of the American Republic” Northeastern Political Science Association, Philadelphia, PA (2009)

“The Discourse of Universality: Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and the Enlightenment” New York State Political Science Association, New York, NY (2009)

“Sovereignty, Violence, and the State” Northeastern Political Science Association, Boston, MA (2008)

TEACHING

Y383: Foundations of American Political Thought (Fall 2015)

Y382: Modern Political Thought (Summer 2015)

Y200: Business and Politics (Spring 2015)

Y103: Intro to American Politics (Associate Instructor, Fall 2014)

AWARDS and FELLOWSHIPS

Dissertation Year Research Fellowship, College of Arts and Sciences, Indiana University (2016-2017)

Travel Award, American Political Science Association (2017)

Travel Award, Center on American Politics, Indiana University (2017)

Prestage-Cook Travel Award, Southern Political Science Association (2017)

Graduate Conference Travel Award, College Arts and Humanities Institute, Indiana University (2016-2017)

Graduate Conference Travel Award, Department of Political Science, Indiana University (2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-17)

Graduate Leadership Award, Department of Political Science, Indiana University (2011-12)

Best Paper in Political Philosophy; Indiana University Political Science Graduate Student Conference (2011, 2012)

Max Kade Fellowship, Department of Germanic Studies, Indiana University (2010-11)

Outstanding M.A. Graduate Award, Department of Politics, The New School (2009)

AFFILIATIONS

Global Studies Center, University of Pittsburgh, 2017-2018

American Political Science Association

Midwest Political Science Association

Southern Political Science Association

Association for Political Theory

EDITORIAL EXPERIENCE

Perspectives on Politics, Editorial Assistant, 2011-2016

Indexing for *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. Jeffrey C. Isaac (Yale UP, 2012)

Verso, Editorial Assistant, 2010

Constellations, Editorial Assistant, 2009-10

Dissent, Editorial Assistant, 2007-08

SELECT OTHER WRITINGS

For a comprehensive list of articles, see www.rafaelkhachaturian.com/resources

“Ditching the Deep State” *Jacobin*, Feb. 20, 2017

“How to Bring Down a Dictator: Reading Gene Sharp in Trump's America” (with Jeffrey Isaac), *Dissent*, Feb. 4, 2017

“Trump and the Anti-Establishment Fantasy” *Public Seminar*, Dec. 14, 2016

“On Thinking With and Against the State” *Logos*, 2016

“Social Criticism and the Academy” *Contrivers' Review*, 2014

“How (Not) to Kill a Philosopher: Commentary on Louis Althusser” *Dissent*, Mar. 11, 2014

“The Specter of Russian Nationalism” *Dissent* 56 (2009): 19-24 - Reprinted in *Politics in Russia*, ed. Joel Ostrow (CQ Press, 2012)

LANGUAGES

Russian (Native fluency in speaking, reading, writing)

German (Beginning reading)

Spanish (Beginning reading)